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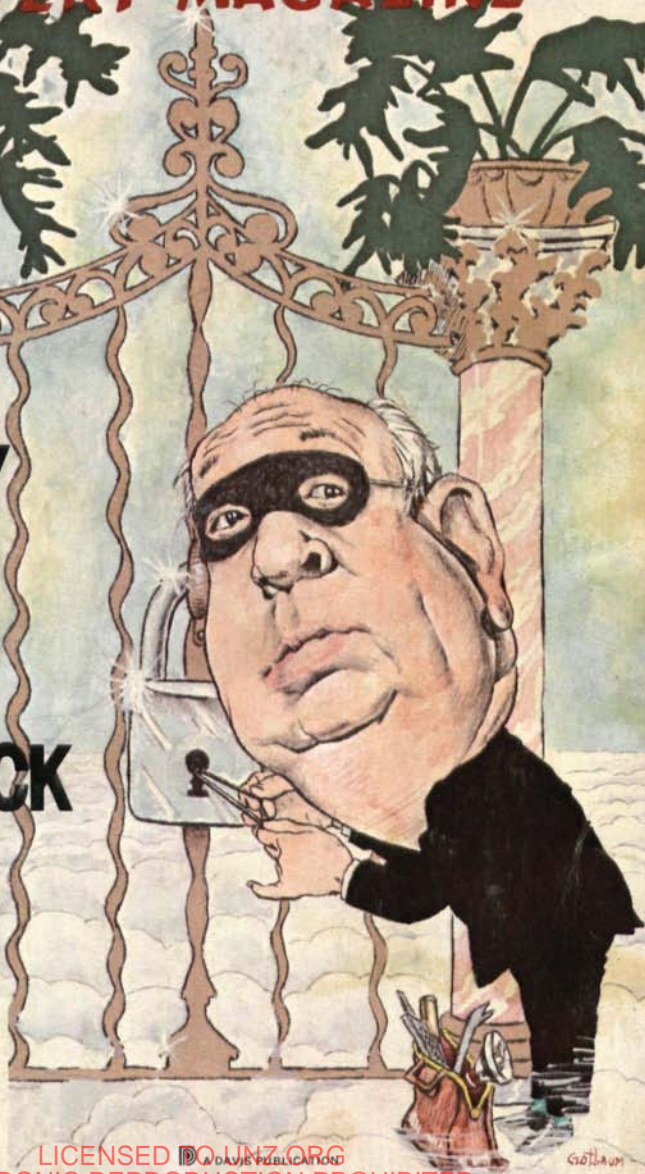
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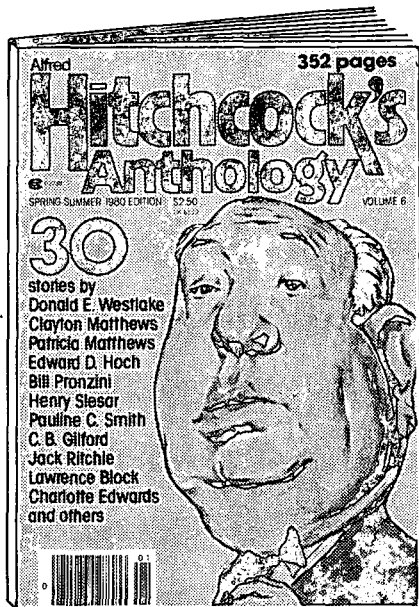
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NEXT
 ISSUE
 ON SALE
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NOVELETTE

THE HAWK AND HIGH SOCIETY *by S. S. Rafferty* 102

SHORT STORIES

DEFENSIVE MOVES *by William Bankier* 5

THE WITNESS *by Henry Slesar* 21

TO STEAL A KING *by Jeffry Scott* 28

MAN'S BEST FRIEND *by Lee Somerville* 39

A MATTER OF WITNESSES *by Lawrence Treat* 47

ROUGH JUSTICE *by Judy Chard* 59

CAT DANCE *by Virginia Layefsky* 68

TOP SALESMAN *by Gary Alexander* 78

VIOLET *by Hal Ellison* 83

A SLIGHT CHANGE OF PLAN *by Carroll Mayers* 94

MOVIES AND TELEVISION

CRIME ON SCREEN *by Peter Christian* 122

LETTERS 65

ALFRED HITCHCOCK'S MYSTERY MAGAZINE Vol. 25, No. 8, Aug. 13, 1980. Published 13 times a year, every 28 days, by Davis Publications, Inc. at \$1.25 a copy. Annual subscription \$13.00 in the U.S.A. and possessions, \$15.00 elsewhere. Allow 6 to 8 weeks for change of address. Editorial and Executive Offices, 380 Lexington Ave., N.Y., N.Y. 10017. Subscription orders and mail regarding subscriptions should be sent to P.O. Box 2640, Greenwich, Ct. 06836. Controlled circulation postage paid at Dallas, PA. © 1980 by Davis Publications, Inc., all rights reserved. Protection secured under the Universal Copyright Convention. Reproduction or use without express permission of editorial or pictorial content in any manner is prohibited. Printed in U.S.A.: All submissions must be accompanied by stamped self-addressed envelope; the Publisher assumes no responsibility for unsolicited manuscripts. **ISSN: 0002-5224**

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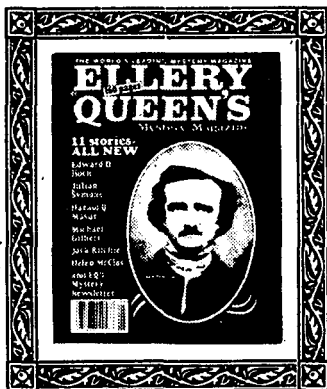
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August 13, 1980



Dear Reader:

W. C. Fields was of the opinion that no man who hates children and pets can be all bad. See what you think after reading in this month's issue about some examples of these small beings.

A disreputable-looking mutt comes between two cousins in "Man's Best Friend" by Lee Somerville. A child proves herself to be the worst kind of pest in Hal Ellson's "Violet." The Hawk and Captain Fenley investigate when someone reports the presence of a monkey in fashionable Washington Square in "The Hawk and High Society" by S. S. Rafferty. What can happen when a boy and a girl who are child prodigies grow up and marry is chillingly depicted in Henry Slesar's "The Witness." And you'll shiver over the bizarre and haunting "Cat Dance" in the story by Virginia Layefsky, an author new to our pages.

Good reading.

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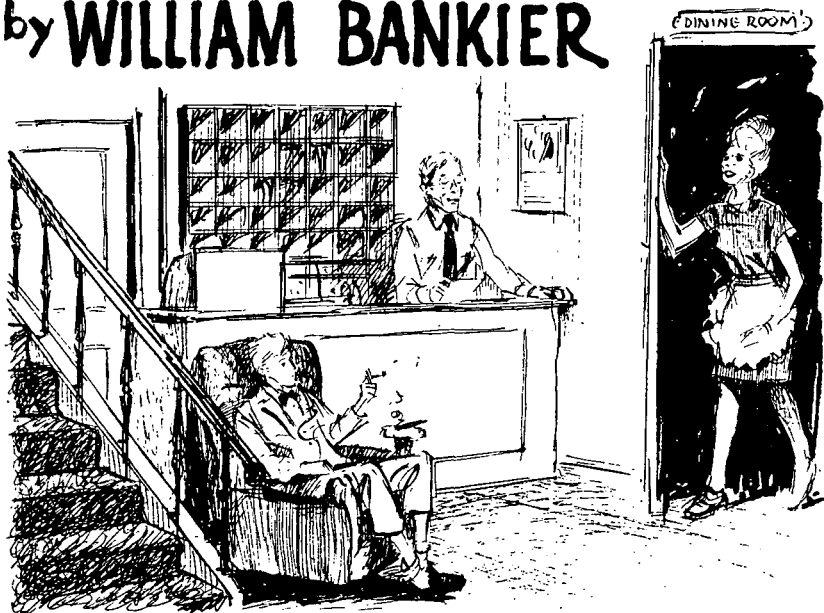
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Duffy Preston had a famous collection of winning hockey pucks . . .

DEFENSIVE MOVES

by WILLIAM BANKIER



The lobby of the Coronet Hotel was crowded but quiet. Solidly built men had been gathering for the last twenty minutes, most of them off the team bus, others arriving in their own shiny, late-model cars. Professional ice hockey was fussy about its image, and the Watertown Sentinels met the standard with their good suits, shiny shoes, sensible haircuts, and heavy, clean-shaven jaws.

Everybody was waiting for Maxim Lepine, who had gone to park his

car outside the Baytown Arena on the south side of the market square, visible from the hotel window. As team manager, Lepine was going to assign the rooms. Marvin Kelly, the hotel desk clerk, did not mind the delay except that it left him to spend time with Jack Danforth, the hotel manager.

Danforth was in his element—cashmere jacket unbuttoned, thumb in vest pocket, cigar dead center, eyes wrinkled with pleasure as he tapped a pencil against the room board, waiting to pop the name cards into their numbered slots. It was Kelly's job, but there was no way Jack Danforth would miss this experience. A professional hockey team doing pre-season training in Baytown and staying at the Coronet was for him the high point of the hotel business.

Sam Luftspring, the bellboy, was standing at the foot of the stairs talking to Duffy Preston, the biggest name on this minor-league team. Preston had been famous for years with the Toronto Maple Leafs. Now, with diminished skills, he was eking out his career at Watertown. It was understood that he would move up to management.

"They tell me you've got your puck collection with you," Sam said. The boss had forced Luftspring into a clean white mess jacket but the cigarette fluttering between Sam's lips was dusting it with ash and the buttons were done up out of sequence. His battered shoes, rumpled socks, and trousers inches too short sustained the ragamuffin look Sam had brought with him five years ago when he joined the hotel staff at age fourteen. Squinting through tobacco smoke at Preston's luggage, he saw what must be the puck collection—a rectangular black case with brass corners.

"Yeah," Preston said. "Max told me to bring it along. I don't know what good it does promoting the team in this hick town, but Lepine said do it. And he's supposed to be the manager." A tall, rawboned man with a persistent blink under heavy brows, Duffy Preston never tried to establish himself as a pleasant man. He had always been able to put the puck in the net; let the losers be polite.

"Here he comes," Danforth said.

All eyes turned to the window and focused on a dapper man walking quickly across the street, topcoat open, hands in trouser pockets, narrow-brimmed hat tipped low over his eyes. He was reading the pavement as he came, hollow cheeks blue with a beard that survived two electric shaves a day, lips sharply down at the corners. It was the face of a French

chef whose dressing has gone sour, or of a hockey manager coming off yet another losing season.

Jack Danforth met Lepine at the door, shaking his hand and leading him to the desk while the players fell back on either side. All that was missing was an archway of raised hockey sticks. "Great to see you, Max. A real pleasure to have you and the boys with us."

"Thanks, Jack. Thanks very much."

Their hands were still joined, Danforth's face radiant, Lepine's eyes filling up with the kind of emotion displayed by celebrities on TV chat shows when their books or records are mentioned for the third time.

The ceremony of assigning rooms was carried out with dogged tension, as if the two managers were partitioning Europe. Duffy Preston was dealt with first. "Duffy gets your best single," Lepine said. Then he raised a laugh by saying, "No—I get your best single. He gets your second best."

One of the last to be mentioned was a blocky player with brick-colored cheeks and a lot of grease on his hair, Larry Stasiuk. He was dropped into a three-bed room with a pair of rookies who might not make the team.

"Thanks a lot, coach," Stasiuk said bitterly.

Lepine was not the manager for nothing. He could administer heavy-handed motivation as well as anybody. "I need you in there to influence those kids, Larry," he said. "Your experience will rub off."

"Yeah, sure." Stasiuk grabbed his bag. At the foot of the stairs he stopped and said, "I hear Preston is going to play defense this season so he won't have to skate as much."

"We've discussed it."

"Beautiful. That's all this team needs is two senior-citizen defensemen. Guess who's going to end up on the bench."

"Relax, Larry. When your job is in danger, you'll hear it from me."

"What time is it now?" Stasiuk said flatly as he stumped up the stairs.

With the lobby empty, there was no more reason for Jack Danforth to hang around. He left his cigar smoldering in an ashtray like a sinister claim to the territory and went upstairs to his suite. Sam threw himself into one of the big leather armchairs and Marvin Kelly took up his traditional position by the switchboard, head tipped so that his rimless glasses reflected the light from the window.

"Are you as bored with these guys already as I am?" Sam asked.

"They scare me," Marvin said. "On the surface they're all team spirit

and camaraderie. 'But I get the feeling they don't like each other very much.'

"Watertown lost so many games last year the league had to award them some points so they could qualify for last place."

"Not a happy ship."

"The only one I like is that poor meatball, Stasiuk. At least he admits he's unhappy. The famous Duffy Preston is a rat. And Max Lepine looks like he sleeps upside down and drinks blood."

"Don't say blood, Sam. That lot could start killing each other before the week is out."

The glass door separating the dining room from the lobby opened and out came a girl wearing a grey uniform, white apron, and low-heeled white shoes. Her complexion was pink and white, her eyes green, and she had masses of spectacular blonde hair piled on her head. She walked to the desk and leaned on it, balancing on her elbows and lifting her feet off the floor. Marvin backed away a pace.

"Is the menu typed?" she asked. "What's the smell in here? It smells like Holman's Drug Store."

"You just missed the arrival of the Watertown Sentinels," Marvin said. He found a stack of typewritten sheets and handed them over. "They all do cologne commercials."

"I'm sorry I missed that."

"Don't worry," Sam said. "They asked if this is where Doris Milligan works. We're to send you up to the manager's room as soon as he unpacks his whips."

The waitress reached out and took Sam by the hair, twisting his head and forcing him down until he fell out of the chair and rolled on the carpet. She released him and walked to the dining-room door, holding her hand well away from her uniform. "Now I have to wash again," she said.

Sam got up as the dining-room door closed. His eyes were watering. "Doris is getting vicious," he said.

"She's a country girl," was Marvin's comment. "They're capable of anything."

The hotel, bulging at the seams to absorb the influx of athletes, made whatever adjustments were necessary. The dining room put on an extra sitting so that the locals and the commercial travelers could eat as well

as the hockey players, and the back lounge was turned into a card room.

Practice got underway at the Baytown Arena on the second day. A problem with the artificial ice saw the players losing the puck in patches of fog. This was blamed on the warm September and soon put right. Then everybody was happy.

Well, not quite everybody. As far as Sam Luftspring and Marvin Kelly could see, quite a few people were not enjoying the Sentinels' stay in town.

First there was Roy Leff. Roy was a part-time repairman around the hotel. He was a repairman because he could fix almost anything and he was part-time because the rest of the time he was drinking in the beverage room or sobering up in the furnace room. Roy was on what Marvin called a seven-second delay. You spoke to him and it seemed he had not heard. Seven seconds later, his head lifted and turned, the big boiled face switched on, and he gave you the gap-toothed smile. "Yes?" Roy was with you.

The arrival of the hockey team did something to Roy Leff's metabolism. It reduced his delay from seven seconds to about four. There must have been a lot of adrenalin in Roy's veins to make his responses that sharp.

The player he admired most of all was the major leaguer, Duffy Preston. Roy told Marvin and Sam how he used to listen to the radio broadcasts of Maple Leaf games while his mother was alive and he was living at home instead of in the cubbyhole he now inhabited in the back hallway above the kitchen. He had even hitchhiked to Toronto one weekend and spent Saturday outside Maple Leaf Gardens, hoping somebody would show up with a spare ticket. Nobody did. "But I heard all the cheering inside. The biggest roar was in the third period, when Duffy Preston scored the winner!"

Roy wanted to speak to Preston but kept putting it off because he was too shy. One evening the players had come out of the dining room and some were killing time in the lobby, considering a poker game. Leff came through from the beverage room, gleaming in an unmatched suit, smelling of beer and lavatory soap. Marvin indicated with nods and whispered syllables that this was the time for Roy to approach his hero. In a minute, the clerk was wishing he had kept quiet.

"Mr. Preston? I'm Roy Leff. I'm sorry to bother you—"

"Then why are you?" Preston was holding court with the rookies. There was laughter, but some of them looked at the floor.

"I'm your best fan. My mother and I used to listen to all your games on the radio."

"Don't hang around with your mother so much. It isn't healthy."

Max Lepine had just come from the dining room and heard the exchange. He stared hard at his star player, then intercepted Leff as he made for the front door. "Hey!" he said.

"Yes, sir?"

"Could your boss spare you to come over to the rink tomorrow? I need somebody to fix the door on the penalty box."

"O.K.," Roy said. "I'll bring my tools. I'll come over in the morning."

Somebody else who was unhappy was the girl in the expensive car who drove up the next afternoon, identified herself as Miss Carmen Barr, and asked for a room.

"Have you a reservation, Miss Barr?" Marvin asked.

"No. Do I need one?"

"I'm afraid so. We have a hockey team staying with us."

"I know. That's why I'm here."

Mr. Danforth cruised out of the back office, attracted by the American voice. He looked at the girl and liked what he saw. She was in her thirties, with dark red hair, big-city grooming, and a handsome face radiating confidence. Carmen Barr frequently said no to people but the word rarely came back to her.

"Is there a problem?" the manager said.

"I'm a friend of Duffy Preston's. I drove up from Detroit to surprise him. Now it seems I should have phoned ahead."

"That's all right, Miss Barr." Danforth placed a registration card before her and handed her his own pen. "A cancellation came in a while ago. I took it, Marvin. I forgot to tell you."

This act of courtesy established a benign mood in the hotel until four-thirty when Duffy Preston—who had skipped practice with what he said was a muscle strain—came out of the Capitol Cinema accompanied by Doris Milligan and walked across the street, entering the lobby with the blonde waitress on his arm. Obviously, they had not seen much of the movie; they were as tousled as a couple of teenagers.

"Hello, Duffy," the girl from Detroit said. "I thought I'd come and surprise you. I see I did."

"Carmen! I was going to phone you."

"I have to go to work," Doris Milligan said. She gave the room a puffy smile and vanished into the dining room.

The hockey player recovered his balance. "This is no place for you, Carmen. I wanted you to wait till I got back after training."

The girl gave him a steely look. "Is there someplace we can get a drink?" she said. "I want to talk to you."

They went into the ladies' beverage room and Jack Danforth went back into his office. Marvin Kelly raised his eyebrows at Sam. "I wouldn't want that lady mad at me," he said.

The switchboard gave out a stuttering noise and Kelly frowned at it. "It sounds like Mr. Lepine is having trouble with his line to Montreal," he said. The desk clerk had dialed the call himself on instructions from Lepine's room.

"Maybe a knot in his phone cord," said Sam.

Kelly put a finger to his lips and the bellboy went silent. The clerk picked up his receiver and listened as he carefully opened a key on the switchboard panel. His eyes closed for a moment, then he eased the key shut and replaced the receiver.

"Is his wife giving him hell?"

"No, but you're warm." Kelly refused to tell Sam any more. "It's a sin to listen in on private calls," he said. "Shame on you for asking."

The pair were still on duty when Larry Stasiuk came out of the dining room with his rookie roommates. They were in advance of the other players and had the lobby to themselves. Stasiuk looked depressed.

"I was never able to play in the major leagues," he said, "for one simple reason. I'm fast once I get skating but it's the take-off. Have you seen Preston start up? He can be standing still and in three strides he's at full speed. I could never do that."

"There's more to playing defense than speed," one of the young men said.

"Oh, I get by on experience. I *used* to get by. This year the great Duffy Preston has decided to put in for my job."

"He hasn't got your defensive moves."

"He's got the name. The people pay to see Duffy Preston. You wait till they announce the cuts—Stasiuk is going to end up playing in Rainy River, Alberta."

Preston swaggered out of the dining room with Carmen Barr just be-

hind him. He saw the players by the window. "Come on, lads," he said, ignoring Stasiuk. "Come into the lounge and I'll give you a chance to win your money back." He took a deck of cards from his jacket pocket.

"Not a poker game!" Carmen complained.

"I told you you should have stayed away. This is a training camp. Women don't fit in."

"That blonde seemed to be fitting in this afternoon."

"Is my little Carmen jealous?" The persistent blink went on and off like a signal lamp. "Sit down, and tell your troubles to Stasiuk there—his are worse than yours." Preston led the rookies into the lounge. "I'll only be a couple of hours," he called back. "If you're still around, I'll take you up the street for a cheese sandwich."

Everybody stared at the lounge doorway as if they had just witnessed the closing scene of a tragedy and were waiting for the curtain to fall.

"Why is he such a bastard, Larry?" Carmen asked.

"Because he's a genius. At his best, nobody in the NHL could move from the blueline to the goal like he could or put the puck in the net as often as he did. His talent sets him apart. He feels he doesn't have to behave like the rest of us."

Sammy Luftspring, leaning on the desk and listening, decided Stasiuk was right. Somewhere in his disorderly room on Station Street was a thick deck of bubble-gum cards bound with an elastic band. The most-thumbed card carried the photograph of Duffy Preston in his Maple Leaf uniform. How many times had Sam stared at the compact figure leaning forward, taped stick held at an angle in the bulky gloves, hair immaculately combed, eyes looking through the camera into the souls of a million Canadian kids? What Sam remembered most clearly about the picture was Preston's skates. The boots were very shiny and the toecaps looked like ripe fruit. Sam could have taken a bite out of those boots.

"Come on, Larry," Carmen said, getting to her feet. "Let's not sit here like two lost souls. Let's go for a walk."

Stasiuk followed her out of the lobby.

"There goes the I Hate Duffy Preston Club," Kelly said.

Max Lepine was the last of the Watertown contingent out of the dining room. He stood alone for a minute or so, giving the lobby the benefit of his gloom. When Danforth appeared in his office doorway, Lepine said, "Jack, I'm away all day tomorrow and tomorrow night. I have to go see

the people in Montreal." The Sentinels were in the Montreal Canadiens system; when Watertown was in trouble, there were long faces in the executive suite at the Forum on Ste. Catherine Street.

"That's fine, Max," Danforth said. "Everything going well?"

"No, but that isn't your fault."

Roy Leff came through the doorway from the beverage room and began his dogged progress across the lobby toward the main door. To look at people confused him, so he kept his eyes straight ahead.

"Roy—" Lepine seized the repairman's arm as he went past and swung him around. "Thanks for fixing that door on the penalty box."

"I'm sorry it took so long. I had to take it off the hinges and plane it down."

"You're a dependable man, Roy. Come upstairs. I've got a present for you in my room."

It was later and Sam was about to go off duty when Leff came downstairs carrying a Sentinels hockey sweater. His face was radiant; he had been given a glimpse of Paradise. As Sam prepared to leave, Carmen Barr and Larry Stasiuk returned from their walk, silent as people are who have faced serious truths. From the back room came the arrogant bellow of Duffy Preston's laughter. He was winning again.

Max Lepine drove away to Montreal the next day and the team practiced without him. Minus their manager to chaperone them, most of the players broke curfew that night. The following morning they slept a bit later than usual and rushed into the dining room to snatch breakfast before streaming across the road to the arena for practice. It would be another easy session; slave-driver Max was not due back till early afternoon.

The players were amused by the fact that Duffy Preston didn't appear at all. So much for having your woman drive in from Detroit. But when Carmen Barr came downstairs at ten looking bright as the morning and went over to the rink to watch Duffy practice, it canceled the theory that he had spent the night with her.

Marvin telephoned Preston's room. Nobody answered the phone. That was when Sam went upstairs, knocked heavily on the door several times, and finally used his pass key to let himself in.

Duffy Preston was still in bed. Not exactly in it, but on it. He was fully dressed, with a whisky bottle open on the table beside him and a glass

lying on the floor. "Mr. Preston?" Sam said. But the silence in the room and the shape and color of the man's face told the bellboy that the great Duffy Preston was dead.

For a few days, the Coronet Hotel was the property of police and reporters. Chief Greb took over the investigation himself and enjoyed being approached by journalists from cities on both sides of the border. Preston had died from the effects of a poisonous substance which had been introduced into the bottle of whisky he kept at his bedside and from which it was his habit to take a drink each night before retiring. Asked what the poison was, the policeman was not yet ready to say.

Did the chief have any suspects?

Greb was noncommittal, though it was common knowledge that Preston was not well liked.

From their inside position, Marvin Kelly and Sam Luftspring knew that certain individuals had stronger motives than others. Larry Stasiuk was being eased out of his place on the team by Preston and he resented it. Carmen Barr had come from Detroit to see Preston and he had publicly humiliated her. In the category of women scorned, there was also Doris Milligan. After the initial date at the Capitol Cinema, it appeared that Preston had treated her as if she was invisible. Roy Leff had been cruelly insulted by Preston, the repairman's relationship with his late mother brought into question in front of a crowded lobby.

As for opportunity, any of the suspects could have gained entry to the deceased's room, with or without invitation.

Max Lepine was a shattered man. He came back from Montreal to find his star player dead. He got through on the telephone to the Forum to let the directors know the bad news. After the call he went around the hotel giving his players a serious pep talk.

"This is where teamwork takes over," he said. "They know at the head office we're in trouble, but they've given us the whole season to shape up."

Kelly listened to the lecture and when Lepine left the hotel he said to Sam, "There goes a fortunate man."

"What do you mean?"

"Stick around. I may produce a theory one day soon for you and Chief Greb."

Chief Greb needed all the help he could get the next day when Carmen

Barr checked out without his permission. He told her she was an important witness. She said she had things to do back home—if he wanted to arrest her he would have her father to deal with, and her father was the head of an important company. Greb backed down.

Another suspect, Larry Stasiuk, began to show a happy face. His position on the team was now secure for the season, perhaps for many seasons to follow. When Greb questioned him, Stasiuk was an open book. Yes, he admitted, he disliked Preston and had benefited from his death, but he had not poisoned him. He would help in any way he could. A hunch player, Greb crossed the defenseman's name off his list.

Doris Milligan turned the situation to her advantage. Her boy friend of long standing was an apple grower from Picton named Ernie Clark. He now announced his engagement to Doris. The wedding was to take place before Thanksgiving. Cynical Baytowners hinted that Ernie was moving quickly to save the girl's reputation. People didn't suddenly get married after all those years—not without a reason.

Roy Leff began wearing his Sentinel sweater around the hotel. It was the large white letter S that caught Sam's attention one afternoon as he was taking a shortcut through the furnace room. The letter gleamed from the darkness of the coal heap. He looked in and saw Leff stretched out on a couple of tons of anthracite, moving just enough to indicate life.

"You all right, Roy?"

"Some—seen some things—seen 'em all."

Sam leaned over the repairman. The smell of beer was powerful. "Had a few, eh, Roy?"

"Seen all—seen alla pucks."

"You saw what?"

"Alla pucks. Gamesey won—heard on a radio—"

"Preston's puck collection? You saw it?"

"Bastard won a lotta games."

Sam had to wait till mid-afternoon before the lobby was clear and he was able to talk to Marvin. "Know where old Leffie is?"

"I haven't seen him."

"He's on the coal pile, bombed out of his mind."

"Each of us finds happiness in his own way."

"He said he saw Duffy Preston's puck collection."

"The famous collection of game-winners? It was supposed to be shown to the press, but that was canceled."

"Roy says he saw it."

"It's hard to believe Preston would have shown it to him. He had no time for Roy."

"But Roy must have been in the room." Sam considered the problem. "He has a pass key."

"He'd never go in alone. He's too shy."

"So somebody brought him there."

Marvin Kelly turned a few degrees toward the window and tipped his head. The angle was perfect; his glasses went opaque and he became a robot, a thinking machine. "You've given me two, Sam," he said. "I have the other two which may add up to four. Remember the phone call Max Lepine made to Montreal, the one I listened in on?"

"That was a sin."

"From sin can come justice. Max was talking to his employers. And here's what I happened to hear." Kelly recalled the words. "'You've got till Christmas to start winning, Max, then Preston gets his chance.'"

There was silence in the lobby as they considered the implications. "What does it mean?" Sam asked.

"It means Lepine was on the hot seat. Preston was a candidate for manager. That makes sense. A star name, one reaching the end of his playing days. Montreal was telling Max that if he went on losing they'd drop him in mid-season and install Preston as manager."

"Put it all together," Sam said, "it spells motive."

In the days that followed, Marvin and Sam observed what could only be called a troubled Roy Leff. He did his work but the famous seven-second delay had become infinite. The change registered on one guest in particular.

"Hey, Roy!" Max Lepine said one evening as Leff floated through the lobby. The repairman kept going, disappearing in the direction of his furnace-room lair. Max turned to Marvin. "I wanted to talk to that guy. What's the matter with him?"

"He's been upset since Preston was killed," Kelly said. He decided to drop a stone in the pool and see how far the ripples would reach. "I heard him say something about going for a talk with Chief Greb."

Max looked as if he had swallowed something sharp. A minute later he got up and headed for the stairs. "Could you ask Roy to come up to my room?"

Sam went to find Roy and tell him Max wanted him. When the bellboy returned, Marvin asked him how Leff had responded. "Like I'd told him he was next into the lion's cage," Sam said. "What do you think is going on between those two?"

"It's time we exerted some pressure. What say you do a corridor patrol?"

Sam took the stairs two at a time and swung down the hall past the rows of numbered doors. He paused outside Lepine's room and heard muffled voices.

"I can't accept that," Leff was saying.

"Two hundred dollars is more than you see in a year. Shut up and take it."

"I won't. I have to go, Max."

A movement in a room across the hall sent Sam hurrying away.

When he reported the conversation to Kelly, the clerk said, "It could be harmless. He might be helping Leff out with a loan."

"Or?"

"He could be buying Roy's silence." Kelly was looking thoughtful. "Let's try something else. Did you bring in those paint tins from the back of Mr. Danforth's station wagon?"

"I was just going to."

"Don't be so conscientious. Wait." Kelly plugged in a cord and rang Lepine's room. "Sorry to trouble you, Mr. Lepine—is Roy still there?"

"He is."

"Could you send him down, please? He's supposed to go over and see Chief Greb, but before that he's got a job to do out back by the river."

When Kelly replaced the phone, Sam said, "What's happening?"

"From here on it's a gamble. I'm depending on Max to try to win the game in the closing minutes."

Roy Leff came downstairs and went with Sam, who had been listening to whispered instructions from Marvin. Kelly was then left alone to frown at his watch and wonder if he would have to do something else to dislodge Max Lepine.

But no further prompting was necessary. Quick footsteps pattered on the stairs and there was Lepine, trying to look several ways at once. "Poor old Roy," he said with a brittle grin, "he must be in trouble if Greb wants to question him again."

"It may be nothing," Kelly said. "The chief may just want him to plane down a sticky door."

Lepine gave him a look. "Did he go over there?"

"Not yet. He's out back collecting some paint tins from the rear of Mr. Danforth's station wagon. I'm worried about him."

"Why?"

"There's a low parapet and then a fifteen-foot drop to the river. Mr. Danforth always backs in and parks facing the street so he can drive straight out." Kelly indicated the laneway entrance beyond the lobby window. "Roy's so vague these days, if he takes too many steps backward he could fall over the edge."

Lepine rubbed a blue cheek and cleared his throat. "I guess I'll go up street and buy a cigar," he said. He left by the front door and Kelly saw him dart past the window in the direction of the lane. The clerk rang the desk bell and Sam's head appeared in the lounge doorway. "Cue Roy," Kelly said. "I think it's working."

It was dark in the alleyway. Max Lepine had to proceed with caution, guiding himself with a hand on the brick wall. At the end of the alley the darkness lightened enough so he could see the gleaming chrome on several parked cars. Farther away there was movement. He crept between cars, keeping low, until he could make out the white letter S on Roy Leff's Sentinel sweater. He seemed to be leaning into the back of a vehicle, straightening up, and then bending as he set objects on the ground. The paint tins.

Lepine used the clatter of the tins as cover for another advance. Now he was behind the front left fender of Danforth's station wagon. He could see the grey straight line just above ground level which was the stone parapet. Fifteen feet below was the river.

He had come too far to turn back. Waiting till Leff's back was turned, Lepine rose and strode swiftly forward. He put an arm around the repairman's throat, slammed a knee against his back, and drew him off balance. But then an arm went around his own throat and he was dragged down. "Get his legs, Roy!" It was the bellboy's voice.

"I got him, Sam."

The pair were too strong for Lepine. "O.K.," he said, "let me up! It's all over!"

They brought him into the lobby where he leaned on the desk like any

other guest checking in and told Sam and Marvin how it had been done. Roy Leff, shaken by the struggle, went into the beverage room.

"It wasn't Roy's fault. I used him. But I had to do something," Lepine confirmed how he was going to lose his job to Duffy Preston—and there was no place else for a man of his age and with his won/lost record to go in professional hockey. He was desperate. "Preston's behavior had been making me mad for a long time," he said. "His cruelty to Roy is only one example. And the way he used that girl in the dining room. This world is a better place without him."

Kelly agreed that might be so, but he questioned Lepine's authority in moving Preston on to the next one. "How did the poison get in the whisky?" he asked.

"That was the trick. I knew Preston treated himself to a stiff shot, a double, every night before he went to sleep. And he was stingy. He never gave anybody else a taste out of that bottle. So I got Roy to come upstairs and use his pass key to let us into Preston's room while he was playing poker in the lounge."

"I remember," Sam said. "That was the evening Roy came down with the Sentinel sweater."

"I gave him the sweater in my room later. First we went into Preston's room and I showed him the puck collection. Then I gave us each a drink out of the bedside bottle. I said we deserved it because Preston had been so rude."

"Did the poison go in then?"

"No. I wanted to be out of town when Duffy died. So I set up my trip to Montreal for the next day. And that morning I gave Roy a small bottle of whisky and told him to top up Duffy's bottle with it—I said I had second thoughts and didn't want to owe that bastard anything, even a few ounces of booze, but that Preston mustn't know. Roy agreed to sneak in and pour it into the bottle when the team was practicing."

"And the poison was in the small bottle you gave Leff?"

"Right."

"Then Roy's clear," Kelly said. "He had no idea he was doing anything wrong. And now, Max," he added, picking up the phone and beginning to dial, "I think it's time for the police."

When Chief Greb arrived, he sat in one of the big leather chairs looking at the floor while Kelly outlined the case against Lepine. The unwitting

accomplice, Roy Leff, was available for questioning whenever he was needed, Kelly told him.

At the end of the account, Greb looked at Lepine for the first time. "What kind of poison did you put in that whisky bottle?"

"Rat poison," Lepine said. "We had rats at home a while ago. The stuff wasn't all used."

"That would be one of the zinc phosphides," Greb said. "Very lethal. But it proves you didn't kill Preston. I just wanted to confirm it. The autopsy showed an insecticide was used—malathion, the sort of thing found around an apple orchard."

"But that would mean—"

Greb raised his eyes to stare at Kelly behind the desk. "I've just come from Ernie Clark's farm in Picton. Doris Milligan was there. When I confronted them with the evidence, she confessed. She got hold of some poison from the farm and brought it to work. Then she sneaked a pass key from one of the maids and went into Preston's room. She spiked his whisky and he drank it that night." Greb stared out the window at the lights of the police station across the market square. "Doris Milligan is in a cell right now."

Lepine was the first to make the connection. "Then what happened to the poisoned whisky I gave Roy Leff?"

Sam found Roy in his favorite hiding place, the coal room. This time he was not asleep, he was unconscious. The small bottle lay beside him, almost empty. He must have taken a massive swallow. They rushed him to hospital but it was too late. Before he died, he confessed he had been afraid to enter Preston's room again. So the lethal whisky was never delivered. He had saved it to treat himself, and tonight had seemed as good a time as any.

Lepine was charged with manslaughter and Doris Milligan was charged only with second-degree murder because the local court felt she had justification. It was never proved that Ernie Clark supplied the poison. Doris insisted she took it without his knowledge. Ernie married her before the trial began, and she had her baby in prison.

The boy grew up strong and now, at the age of ten, he's scoring three goals a game in the Baytown Pee-Wee Hockey League. They say he mesmerizes opposing goal tenders with his persistent blinking under those heavy eyebrows. He's already being looked at by big-league scouts so he'll probably end up in pro hockey.

Dr. Bull wore the assassin's cloak uneasily . . .

THE WITNESS

by HENRY SLESAR



As he grew older, Dr. Bull wore the assassin's cloak uneasily. As a youth in Budapest, the occupation had suited his glossy black hair, his hidden eyes and blade-like jaw; he was a figure of romantic menace in his wide-shouldered tight-belted trench coat, the heavy blue revolver cunningly balanced beneath his right armpit. Now he was nearing fifty, his hair sparse and grey, his eyes brought out of hiding by a pair of thick-lensed spectacles, his wide shoulders minimized by a bulging waist and profes-

sorial paunch. The weight of an automatic induced a painful bursitis, so he now carried another weapon.

But while Dr. Bull deplored time's decay, he was more successful than ever in his chosen profession. For one thing, he was still totally devoid of fear; he seemed to have been born without it, as some children are born without sight or hearing or limbs. For another, his employers knew that the day of theatrical assassins was past; the grim-lipped boys in trenchcoats were no longer in demand. Dr. Bull had something far more valuable. He had respectability.

The man he knew only as Langdon said as much during their introductory conversation at the St. Moritz restaurant. Langdon had sent a message through the usual channel, the ticket-reservations clerk at Dr. Bull's hotel, and Dr. Bull had kept the appointment willingly. His last assignment had been in Central America, and the military junta which had employed him had been unfortunately hung before payment was received. He had promised himself a long rest, but had found, to his surprise, that even resting was expensive. Therefore Langdon.

"You'll pardon me," Langdon said coolly. "I didn't mean to give offense. When I mention your appearance, it is only to compliment. One would never guess . . ."

"All right," Dr. Bull said wearily. "Get on with it. I don't suppose you care to name the people you represent?"

"Naturally, I would not."

"But I assume you're willing to name the object of their interest?"

"Not one object," Langdon said. "In this case, two."

"You know my fee? There are no special rates."

"My client is willing to pay twice your customary fee. This should be attractive, since it will be no more trouble for you to deal with two, in this instance, than one. They are a married couple."

"A woman?" Dr. Bull folded the paper doily in front of him. "I have not been accustomed to dealing with women."

"Scruples?"

"Merely a statement. What sort of married couple worries your friends?"

"An unusual couple. Their name is Blessner, Mr. and Mrs. Robert Blessner, but the woman's maiden name is Patience Cole. I assume you've heard of them."

Dr. Bull rubbed his jaw. "The names are familiar, but I don't—Wait.

Something to do with physics. A team of atomic scientists—”

“Yes, you know them. Their publicity has been meager, deliberately so, but I can promise you this. Once your assignment is completed, their obituaries will be extraordinary. Quite an amazing pair, these Blessners.”

“Tell me something about them.”

Langdon smiled, and picked up his Pernod. “To me, the most interesting feature of their career was their respective childhoods. When Robert Blessner was three years old, he was an astonishingly gifted musical prodigy, a concert pianist. Actually, his musical genius was only a fraction of his remarkable powers. Mathematics was his forte, of which music was only an expression; at five, he had reinvented calculus. He entered MIT at the age of eleven; it was shortly after his graduation that he met the woman who was to become his wife.

“Patience Cole had been born two years after Blessner, and her infant achievements were almost as spectacular. She had mastered three languages by the age of six, but her interest in science didn’t begin until the age of fourteen, when she met Robert Blessner. It was because of her fondness for him that she began her studies in science. He was her mentor, but some say she even surpassed him in her comprehension of post-Einsteinian physics. When they reached their majority, they were married; eighteen months ago, they had their first child. Together, they have become a working team whose accomplishments have attracted world-wide scientific attention. They live in the suburbs of New York, quite like any ordinary young married couple. But they are far from ordinary, Dr. Bull.”

Dr. Bull looked sorrowfully into his empty glass. “And these innocents—are marked?”

“Not so innocent; did I give that impression? The work they are doing now, while unpublicized, is work that is essential to the defense of their country. While they prefer to live seemingly normal lives, they are as classified as any secret in the locked cabinets of Washington.” Langdon lifted an eyebrow. “However, I must confess that my client isn’t merely slaughtering scientists willy-nilly. No, this goes deeper, Dr. Bull. It’s my understanding that the Blessners have been approached by my client in an attempt to win their services through an idealistic appeal that once—in his extreme youth—Robert Blessner seemed to favor. The attempt failed, and my client resorted to a crude threat. That threat must be carried out now. It is a matter of honor.”

"What an interesting word," Dr. Bull murmured.

"Now," Langdon said, suddenly businesslike, "I have some ideas as to how you might approach them—"

"I don't need your ideas," Dr. Bull said stiffly. "I prefer to work completely on my own, from the inception of an assignment to its conclusion. You will pardon me, but this is my way."

Langdon chuckled. "They told me you were an unusual man. Tell me, doctor—is it true that you are afraid of *nothing*?"

"Nothing," Dr. Bull said coldly, and Langdon believed him.

Schofield Park wasn't a park at all. It was a random collection of white-roofed homes separated by just enough grass to define the mowing chores of the residents. The Park was within strolling distance of a large suburban city, but once you were within its confines, it was like being in a small town where all the population shared a similar economic class. Dr. Bull, ambling along the elm-lined streets and smiling at tricycled children and sniffing dogs, held no social views regarding Schofield Park. It was merely a place to do business. On a dead-end street, its rear windows facing Long Island Sound, lived the Robert Blessners.

He knew the approach had to be deft. There was always the risk that the Blessners' acquaintances were carefully scrutinized; the security agencies were too wise to allow anything else.

He turned into the driveway of the Blessner home, and headed straight for the front door. There was a doorbell, which he ignored. He knocked. It was some time before he got a response, and he knew why the moment Robert Blessner opened the door. The young man, his face smudged and his knees caked with dirt, had obviously been engaged in Sunday gardening chores. He looked at Dr. Bull blankly for a moment, encompassing his professorial figure and seedy clothing in a quick, perceptive glance. He wore heavy-rimmed eyeglasses, yet he looked more like a college athlete than a scholar. "Yes?" he said.

Dr. Bull answered, in Magyar. When Blessner seemed perplexed, he waved his hand weakly, and repeated his words. He was asking for directions, for the route that would lead him back to the city. He was saying that he was confused by all the winding streets, and would he kindly help him. Then the young man did as Dr. Bull knew he would; he turned and shouted in the direction of the staircase, dimly seen from the doorway. A moment later, a young woman in a peasant blouse and wooden shoes

that clacked on the floor appeared. She was pretty, in a pinch-faced, intent manner that appealed to Dr. Bull's taste.

She listened to him a moment, and her answer, in Magyar, was, "Oh, I know how confusing it is. Sometimes I get lost myself." Then she smiled. He burst into excited speech, praising her kindness, her beauty, her lovely home, and became so emotional at hearing his mother tongue on her lips that tears started in his old eyes. Patience Blessner seemed touched.

"You understand how it is," he said, struggling to regain control. "I am a stranger, an immigrant; everyone has tried to be kind. But without words—" He shrugged. "Words mean so much sometimes."

"Was there anyone you were looking for? Someone who lives in the park?"

"No, no. I was visiting a friend in the city and decided to take a walk in the sunshine. I saw these beautiful streets, with the pretty houses and the children. It made me think of home, of Buda." He pulled a large crumpled handkerchief from his pocket. I don't know why I should feel such sadness today. It is more than three years since I thought so much about home. The last time I saw it—" He gestured mournfully. "The streets ran red."

Patience Blessner looked at her husband and bit her lip. She said something in a low voice, and turned again to the stranger just in time to see him stagger slightly.

"Are you all right? Do you feel well?" she said.

"A little weak. Perhaps I have walked too long in the sun. But do not trouble. I will be all right—"

"Perhaps I can get you something. A cold drink?"

"I don't wish to intrude."

"It's no trouble." In English, she said to her husband, "The poor man doesn't look well, Bob. Do you think it would be all right, just this once?"

He frowned at her. "You know what they said, Poppet. No exceptions."

"I'm sick and tired of *them*, if you want the truth." She spoke bitterly, but then her voice, in Magyar, was soft and compassionate. "You come on inside, Mr.—"

"Laszlo," Dr. Bull said. "But really, I don't think you should . . . if I could just sit here, on the steps, for a moment."

"You'll do no such thing. You'll come inside and have a nice cold drink. Or maybe some brandy. Would that be better?"

"A cold drink will be fine." Dr. Bull smiled. "You are very kind."

The living room was a Sunday shambles. Newspapers were strewn across the carpet, and the remains of Sunday brunch were still scattered on the marble top of the coffee table. There was a playpen in the corner, ringed by toys that had been flung through the bar by the infant occupant. The boy, tow-headed and clear-eyed, watched curiously as the stranger entered. Patience Blessner made no attempt to straighten up the room; without self-consciousness, she pushed some pillows into the corner of the sofa and asked their visitor to sit down. Then she went into the kitchen. Her husband, watching from the doorway, filled a pipe with shreds of tobacco. Finally, he grinned, shrugged, and went over to the mantel of the fireplace. He took down a wooden box and offered Dr. Bull a cigarette. Dr. Bull smiled back gratefully, but shook his head. A moment later, Patience returned with a pitcher containing green liquid. She filled a glass and handed it to him.

"To your health," Dr. Bull said in labored English. The young couple smiled at him, and then at each other. He sipped his drink, sighed, and placed the glass on the coffee table. Then he reached again for the large handkerchief whose white corner protruded stiff from his coat pocket. This time, however, he drew out the tiny revolver with it. He pointed it in the direction of the playpen and said, "Please make no outcry or I will kill the child."

The moment of stupefaction was all he required. He snapped out his next command.

"Please. You will hand me your wallet, Mr. Blessner."

"I'm not carrying a wallet—"

"It is in your hip pocket. Please, Mr. Blessner."

"Give it to him," Patience Blessner said. "Give it to him, Bob."

The young man handed it over and Dr. Bull pocketed it. Then he asked for the watch that the woman was wearing, and the diamond engagement ring. He ignored the gold wedding band, just as any knowledgeable bandit might do.

"Now turn around," he said.

"Wait a minute," the man said. "Let's talk about this."

"My name is Dr. Bull," the assassin said courteously, and pulled the tiny trigger. The woman screamed as her husband fell beside her, but the scream was cut short by the second report of the pistol. He wasted no time in checking the results. The silent pulses of both the man and

the woman told him that his aim had been accurate. He stood up, anxious to leave before curious neighbors appeared.

He was almost at the door when he felt an irresistible urge to return to the room and see his handiwork once more. It was then that he heard the voice.

"Dr. Bull," it said clearly.

"Eh?" The assassin started, his hand trembling suddenly. "What?" he said.

Then he saw the child, standing by the bars of the crib, his wide eyes unafraid, his infant's mouth grim.

"Dr. Bull," the child said. "*You have made a dangerous enemy.*"

The man gasped, and fled towards the doorway. He was out onto the street, running, forgetting the discipline of a lifetime. Even when he knew he was safe, his old heart pounded in his chest, and for the first time in his career, Dr. Bull knew what it meant to be afraid.

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The deposed monarch had been given sanctuary in a banana republic . . .

TO STEAL A KING

by **JEFFRY SCOTT**



“**A**ctually,” said the brown-faced man—charmingly diffident, faintly quizzical, very British—“I’m a smuggler.”

Karen Lindley’s cheeks went hot. She groaned and covered her eyes for an instant. Stuck in the long overheated, motionless line at Customs she and her husband had been passing time by speculating on their fellow travelers’ professions. In undertones, evidently, that hadn’t been quite far enough under.

Tanned, trim, and slightly enigmatic, the perky little man in front of them had occupied several minutes of speculation. Karen thought he had an air of command, like colonial District Commissioners in the midnight movies. Harry Lindley accepted that, but pointed out the cheapish suit and scuffed shoes that suggested a not-too-successful salesman.

"Please don't apologize," the stranger murmured. "I do it myself all the time—wonder about people. It's part of my job, actually."

Karen fanned herself with her passport. "I *thought* you were a smuggler." A corner of her mind registered that he was easy to like and easier to talk to.

"That too." He grinned at Mr. and Mrs. Lindley, offering his hand. "Tim Sherrard. I'm a reporter with the *London Daily Clarion*."

"Is that like *The New York Times*?" Karen asked.

"Not a bit like." Now Sherrard's grin was self-mocking. "It's a sensational sheet by American standards, I'm afraid. But we do pride ourselves on our foreign coverage. Behold a vulture: if there's trouble I'm around, and vice versa."

Harry Lindley nodded abstractedly, only half listening. Now that Sherrard had introduced himself, it was obvious he was a newsman. Lindley, an earnest, prematurely balding young man, was more concerned about the delay than the exploded riddle—though Sherrard hadn't explained his reference to smuggling.

It didn't matter. Harry Lindley was worried over the change at Ciudad Saintes Airport in the two weeks since he and Karen had arrived for their first tropical vacation. The place had been half empty then—a showplace built to buttress national pride, somnolent and uncaring. Now it was full of troops, and police who acted like soldiers. Several flights had been called but their passengers were still on the wrong side of the departure gates while every bit of luggage was searched and scanned.

More sharply than he'd intended, Harry said, "You're the reporter, Mr. Sherrard. What's going on here?"

"Tim—everyone calls me Tim," Sherrard said good-humoredly. "Even Winston Churchill, bless him. 'Tim, I'll see you in my room in ten minutes,' he told me once, and I salivated, positively salivated at getting a scoop. But he just wanted somebody to unlace his boots before he took his between-conferences nap."

The Lindleys chuckled at the anecdote and its teller's comically crestfallen face. But Harry repeated his interest in knowing what was wrong.

Sherrard gazed around as if seeing the milling, buzzing space for the first time. "Lord knows—but, then, they tend to get in a tizzy in these climes. It's nothing to do with us, thank goodness." Over Karen's fair head, he sent her husband a warning frown and an almost imperceptible shake of the head.

Harry felt ashamed. Karen, after all, was bored but not frightened; and he ought to be keeping her that way. "Are you really a smuggler?" he demanded, playing the Englishman's game.

"I never lie to beautiful ladies." Sherrard twinkled at Karen. "Most foreign correspondents are smugglers, actually. Getting the news can be the easiest part of the job. Getting the news *out*—that's the tricky part.

"Take the last time I was in Central America . . ."

A king, an absolute ruler, had been deposed and given sanctuary on the far side of the world, in Country X. His wealth was safe in Swiss banks, but his enemies were everywhere and the security around him was formidable. For two months, ever since bundling into a helicopter on his palace roof, the King had uttered no public word—a state of affairs that pained pretty well every newspaper in the world.

British papers are even more competitive than American ones. Bagging the King became their obsession.

When the rival *Daily Intelligencer* ran a three-column interview with the King's most recent ex-mistress, nothing would do for the *Clarion* but an interview with the King himself.

"We're not interested in the monkey, Tim, we want the blessed organ grinder," shouted the foreign editor, transported with spite over getting his eye wiped. The *Intelligencer* had run a photograph of the ex-mistress, sumptuously filling a crocheted bikini. And while her "revelations" had been tame and predictable, she'd managed to sell a lot of newspapers.

Tim Sherrard spent three days on the phone. On the fourth day he was told to present himself at the Hilton hotel in the capital of Country X, where he might learn something to his advantage. The caller was the ousted King's aide-de-camp, which accounted for Timothy St. John Sherrard dancing a brisk horripipe between desks in the deserted Fleet Street newsroom at four in the morning.

Things started going wrong the minute Sherrard's plane landed. Country X's security men—as distinct from the normal immigration officials

—were expecting him. They intimated they didn't like reporters, admitted they detested *English* reporters, and suggested he catch the next plane back to New York.

Tim Sherrard had argued, pleaded, blustered. He insisted passionately that he was here at the invitation of that honored guest of Country X, the fugitive King. He took the senior security man to one side and bet him five hundred dollars that he, Sherrard, would not be allowed into the country.

The official sighed and shook his head. "At any other time, Señor, I would take your wager. As it is—" He shrugged, but eventually he allowed Sherrard to ring the King's ADC, who demanded to speak to the immigration and security overlords. Three hours after arrival, they presented him with an impressive crackling document bearing seals, green-and-violet-inked frankings, and, for reasons beyond Tim Sherrard, a number of gaudy local postage stamps. One showed a jaguar lunching on a deer. Sherrard knew how that deer had felt.

"The brutes charged me twenty-five quid for it, so I thought I'd got the Freedom of the City or something," he recalled indignantly. "But when I showed it to the manager at the Hilton, he went pale. It was an order for me to leave Country X within thirty-six hours, if you please."

"I was about to tear the wretched thing to shreds—they'd made me *pay* for it, mark you!—but the manager nearly had a fit. He told me that the last chap who'd done that was still in durance vile, counting cockroaches and vainly demanding to see his consul. They put you in the pokey if you didn't beat it within a day and a half, but you couldn't leave without showing the expulsion order. Typical banana-republic nonsense. El Catcho-22."

Sweating in his hotel room, Tim Sherrard worked out what was going on.

"Country X was willing to shelter Kingy as long as his money held out—or, in other words, until hell froze over. As we all know, he stayed four years in the end, and the President's personal holdings increased by exactly four million dollars during the same period—a curiously symmetrical happenstance.

"But, money or no, he was there on sufferance, on Country X's terms. When they found out about him granting me an interview, they had kittens. The King had been sulking for weeks, d'ye see, and that suited them down to the ground.

"There'd been the obligatory student riots when Kingy turned up there, but if a chap never opens his trap or shows himself, indignation evaporates.

"Now El Presidente and his minions aren't fools. They knew the *Clarion* would make a fuss over Kingy's golden words and that our story was bound to be syndicated around the world, not least in Central and South America—promising what one might call an ongoing hornets'-nest situation," Sherrard commented.

"However, they couldn't very well order Kingy to shut up and eat his nice caviar. A million dollars a year under the table buys a semblance of respect.

"Only a semblance though. Bad outlook for yours truly. They'd wait for me to leave the royal presence—a very garlicky, boozy presence it turned out to be, by the way—and simply confiscate all my notes and photographs before booting me out.

"I'd set my heart on pictures of the haggard, grief-ridden monarch. The hotel night-porter got me one of those tiny cameras and some other gear for only twice what he'd paid for them at the Free Port. I maintained an uncommonly low profile, stayed in my room, and waited for the ADC to call."

Next morning the ADC arrived at the hotel and drove Sherrard to a cliff-top villa ten miles from Country X's capital.

The place was isolated and from outside, Tim said, it looked like Sicilian bandits and the New York chapter of organized crime having a lawn party.

"A right old embarrassment of riches securitywise. Coppers with sabers and nickel-plated revolvers, chaps in big hats and pinstripe suits with Uzi submachine guns, cavalrymen with lances, chaps with rifles, in jeans and baseball caps, lads of the village with machetes and unwelcoming expressions.

"I was searched—not gently—three times in as many hundred yards. They let me keep everything, including the tape recorder and the camera, but I didn't like the glint in their eyes."

Then the ADC was opening louvered doors into a big cool room with the ocean stretched like a turquoise mural across the bottom third of a glass cliff of windows. "You were supposed to be here yesterday, you infidel," growled the King.

Sherrard had taken a deep breath. "I can't think what delayed me, Majesty," he'd returned meekly. . .

A soldier's son, Tim Sherrard had grown up in the Middle East and his Arabic was fluent. Further, he had interviewed Kingy half a dozen times since the 1950s, and remembered the monarch's taste for witty smut.

After the third limerick—"I'd had ample chance to polish them slaving over a cold phone in the Hilton"—Kingy ordered the ADC to busy himself elsewhere and roared at the hovering bodyguards and snoops until they skulked off into an anteroom. Another limerick was recited, and capped by the listener.

Then, "Enough frivolity," said the King indistinctly, kicking an empty vodka bottle under the sofa. His eyes were fearfully bloodshot and shrewd as a sniper's.

"Those bastard offspring of diseased dogs in the new regime at home—won't I make them dance when I go back! What's happening there? All I get here are lies and wishful thinking."

Tim hesitated, met the red gaze, and made an instant decision. He spoke quietly and concisely for some four minutes.

The King stared at him. "Thank you," he said. "It's worse than I expected. No chance, you feel?"

"Sorry, Sire. My opinion isn't worth a tinker's cuss, but that's the verdict in Whitehall—and more to the point, in Washington. I over-nighted in Georgetown on the way here to check the climate."

Kingy brooded for a while. There goes my interview, Tim reflected, furious with himself for lacking the ruthlessness and dedication to con a man who was down.

Tim Sherrard was staring at his shoes, wishing that grown men could cry, when somebody started letting water out of a tub with a very restricted plughole. Kingy was laughing helplessly.

"Ah, well, there's always the money, hey?" he wheezed. "What d'you want me to say, O Scribe?"

The next half hour was euphoric. The King might be deposed, a faintly squalid futile gypsy, but he had been a world figure and he knew where the bodies were buried. He discussed heads of state and their dealings with him in a vein of mellow, dismissive malice that was priceless. He explained the workings of the coup that had ruined him in the way a professional conjuror might expose a schoolboy's palming of a coin. He took two United States Presidents to pieces like cheap alarm clocks, leaving them strewn on the oily workbench of his inside knowledge.

At one point Sherrard produced the mini-camera and gestured wordlessly. Kingy nodded and went on letting off steam. Tim was no photographer, but at a six-foot range he hardly needed to be. Kingy, never a religious fanatic, was swigging vodka straight from a fresh bottle between gushes of vitriol.

"Then—to be tactful—he became tired and overemotional, collapsed very slowly on his side, and fell fast asleep," Sherrard recalled, a grin crinkling his narrow, sun-varnished, harmlessly foxy face. "But he'd given me the interview of a lifetime."

Karen Lindley clasped her hands. "Oh, great—good for you!" Her husband blinked, checked his watch, and felt gratitude to the reporter. He'd spellbound them both for a quarter of an hour. The line had hardly moved in that time. Even Karen, an innocent, would have sensed the yet perceptible menace in the airport lounge if they'd just stood around. Sherrard winked at him reassuringly.

"So your troubles were over," Karen crowed. "You'd got your scoop."

Tim Sherrard bowed, then rubbed his nose and went back to looking foxy.

"Troubles over? Dear me, not a bit of it! They were just starting . . ."

The louvered door closed on Kingy's snores, the ADC made a sheepish gesture and whisked away, and the security men pounced on Sherrard with such verve that his feet left the tiled floor.

They confiscated his tape recorder. "Though confiscated's a poor, pallid sort of word for it. One beggar jumped up and down on the poor little box of tricks and the other one pawed through the pieces, made a bundle of the actual tape, and set fire to it. Borrowed my lighter to do it too—a real adding-insult-to-injury stroke."

The security squad also snatched his camera and gloatingly exposed the film, brandishing the milky strip after daylight had done its work. Then they threw him out.

"I'd never been happier," said Tim cheerily.

Karen Lindley gaped at him.

"Well, my memory isn't photographic, but good quotes stick between my ears, and Kingy had reeled off nothing but good quotes. As for the film they ruined, I'd loaded it into the camera just before leaving the

room. The real pictures were tucked away in—" He had the grace to blush—"my intimate apparel, as you might say."

A battle had been won, but not the war, he had reminded himself on the way back to his hotel. The security men at the villa had found what they expected to find and were satisfied. But he knew it couldn't be that easy—he'd be searched again at the airport.

"I locked myself into the hotel bedroom. The porter had got me some developing gear. I developed the film in the bathroom and dried it as best I could, sliced out what seemed to be the best four frames, and flushed the rest down the loo.

"That left me with with four precious pictures—total area about four square inches, I suppose. I didn't *need* them—well, I did, but they weren't utterly, vitally essential. Still, they were today's pictures of Kingy as he'd never been seen before. They were the cherry on my ice-cream sundae. And I desperately wanted to twist Country X's tail.

"I sat on the edge of the bed in my underpants, mulling matters over. Those negatives looked as big as posters—and I very much feared I'd get treatment that would uncover so much as a microdot."

He was not mistaken. Security men escorted him to the airport the following morning—they'd been patrolling the corridor and the patio beneath his bedroom window all night. There was no question of him strolling aboard the New York flight. He was hustled into an office where the searchers waited.

Their leader announced, "Ex-King Hamid has informed my superiors that you interviewed and photographed him, and urges that your departure with this material be expedited." The man was tall and saturnine. He added softly, "So what do you think is in store for you, my friend?"

Tim Sherrard started getting out of his clothes. "You're not my friend. Your goons took everything I had yesterday. I shall protest."

"No," the saturnine man corrected, "you will submit. Any protest you make afterward will be noted."

They stripped, probed, and x-rayed Timothy Sherrard. They squeezed out every inch of his toothpaste, held down the button of his shaving-foam can until it sputtered obscenely, then ripped the can apart. They reduced his paperback books to confetti, ruined his hairbrush, broke his portable mirror, razored the lining out of his suitcase, and cut its handle into slices like a leather cucumber.

At the end of it all, they presented him with their twenty-five-pound expulsion order again, smirking the while, and pushed him aboard the waiting 747. "Come again soon," the saturnine searcher implored, deadpan. "After you have protested."

But Sherrard did smile once the plane was in the air. The four negatives had left Country X with him. Soon he would be landing at JFK, a short taxi ride from the New York bureau of the *London Clarion*.

He started writing his story aboard the jet, in short takes ready for the *Clarion's* Telex operator to transmit to London. The pictures could be printed and wired from there too.

Karen Lindley broke in, almost dancing, tugging at Sherrard's arm. "But how did you *do* it, you old smuggler?"

Tim looked surprised. "Oh, I steamed the stamps off that expulsion order, of course, and stuck 'em back on with a negative under each. Four stamps—that's why I could take only four frames. Two came out and one was really in focus. You still see it turning up in magazines. The *Clarion* made my salary that year just from royalties on the one snap. Dear me, *royalties!* No pun intended."

Karen's delighted laughter was still in the stuffy air when her husband frowned at Tim Sherrard and motioned him aside with a jerk of the chin.

"I wasn't pulling your leg, old lad," Sherrard assured him. "It's a true story."

"I don't doubt it." Harry Lindley was grim. "See here—all this hassle, the searching. It wouldn't have anything to do with you, would it?"

Tim Sherrard was aghast. "Oh, my dear chap! No, I've been in Cuedad Saintes on holiday—sorry, vacation—just like you. I *do* know what's up, because I looked in at the Cuedad Press Club last night—just a courtesy call, showing the flag—"

"So what is up?"

Sherrard rubbed his nose. "Oliva, the most respected dissident in this neck of the woods, got his denunciation of the Cuedad regime out of prison a few days ago. It's handwritten, so there's no question of it being a fake. If that appeared in facsimile on a front page—and I can think of a score of newspapers in as many countries that would give their right arms for it—the ordure would hit the ventilation equipment for the Cuedad Saintes junta. Oliva's a sort of secular saint in Central America. The

bosses here claim that he's in a coma and under intensive care. But his statement, according to rumor, says he's suffering torture."

Harry said, "Are you sure you haven't—"

"Positive." Sherrard was irritated. "But if you're at all worried I'll go to the back of the line. See you aboard." Before Harry could reply, he snatched up his suitcase and strode off.

Karen said, "What was that all about? He's so nice. Have you been hostile again?"

Harry rubbed the back of his neck. "No. Well, sort of—" He explained his doubts.

Karen shook her head. "Go and bring him back, Harry. He'll think you're a suspicious boor."

But the line had moved forward and the police were gesturing for the Lindleys to lift their bags up on the counter. After a glance at their passports, the search was thorough but swift and mechanical; they were walking along the passage to the aircraft within minutes.

The plane filled gradually, the passengers talking about the ordeal, complaining, laughing, comparing notes. Karen kept peering forward, craning back.

"Harry, there's no sign of him."

"He'll show up. Relax." Lindley wondered why he had a sense of defensiveness, almost guilt. Tim Sherrard was an experienced traveler—he could look after himself.

"He'll have 'reporter' on his passport," Karen muttered. "They may take him into custody in case he knows something about that man Oliva's statement."

"You were listening!"

"Of course I was. You've got no sense of adventure, Harry. I'd have offered to take it through for him if he had it."

"He'll show up," Lindley repeated lamely.

But when the 747 roared up over the sullen green forest and out over the blinding blue-steel ocean, Tim Sherrard wasn't anywhere to be seen.

Karen Lindley sighed, thrusting the paperback into her bulging purse and closing it with an effort. Harry pretended to drowse. They hadn't exactly had a row over his treatment of Sherrard, but they'd been married a year and he was beginning to be able to discern thin ice without crashing through it.

"Hello, hello. All merry and bright?" Tim Sherrard was leaning over them, exuding an aura of gin.

Karen beamed at him. "Where've you been?" Harry was relieved.

Sherrard squatted in the aisle, giving them his crinkled brown grin. "I'm in First Class. Came aboard by a different door. No trouble with the search?"

"No." Karen glanced at Harry. "No, we breezed through. And you?"

"Well, the breeze was a bit chilly in my case. My passport says 'representative,' which is true though misleading, but some alert chappie noticed my cable credit-card and then rooted out my press card, so I got the full treatment."

He was jaunty, but for the first time Karen noticed stress lines on his forehead and around his mouth. Guessing her thought, he smiled wryly. "I'll retire next year, and maybe it's time. Though I'll miss all this."

He hesitated for an instant. "Karen, could you spare a cigarette?"

"Sorry, we don't smoke," said Harry.

To her astonishment, Tim Sherrard reached across and undid Karen's purse. "Excuse me, my dear. You ought to pension off this bag. The catch is so weak it's a standing invitation to pickpockets."

His fingers slid past the paperback and emerged with a crumpled, flattened pack of king-size filters. "I don't smoke either—that's why I'm frantic for these cigarettes." He returned the bag to Karen and stood up creakily.

"I really am sorry," he said. "If anything had happened, I'd have taken immediate responsibility."

Karen was struggling for words, trying to decide whether she was furious or simply amazed. Harry had tensed—she had felt the muscle swell in the arm pressed against her—then he laughed explosively. "Hell, you *said* you'd have helped him if you had the chance—"

Tim Sherrard was delicately stripping paper from the long brown cigarettes. As they watched, more paper appeared. A lined roll, and another—a third, a fourth, a fifth—covered in tiny handwriting.

Sherrard looked at the Lindleys. "I did tell you I was a smuggler."

The September 8 issue of *Alfred Hitchcock's Mystery Magazine* will be on sale August 14.

Bull Barton's hit men were after Ron . . .

MAN'S BEST FRIEND



The dog stood between tall pines in front of Jot's cabin, hesitant, indecisive, not really barring the way. It was the ugliest, shaggiest, most misbegotten canine Ron Taylor had ever seen. Instead of barking or growling like a decent watchdog, the-cur stood quietly, its brown eyes staring at Ron, seeming to plead from beneath its unkempt tufts of brown hair.

Ron checked an impulse to kick the animal. 'Damned if he didn't remind

him of Cousin Jot! But, hell, he might have to assume Jot's identity, so he'd better make friends with the dog.

He knew Bull Barton's hired killers would find him. He had stolen Bull's money, and Bull had imported killers, hit men who had never met him and had only photographs to go by. Those men wouldn't know that Ron Taylor and Jot Taylor looked like twins—except that Jot was country and Ron was city.

O. K., if he wanted to pass as Jot, Ron had to make friends with the dog. He hated dogs. Shuddering inwardly, he stuck out his hand.

The dog yipped with joy and rubbed against Ron's good suit. He squirmed, wriggled, and panted happiness with his foul dog's-breath. Ron made himself pet the dog, even let it lick his hand.

Late sunlight shone through a small patch of sky high overhead even as tree shadows twilighted the cabin. A summer breeze stirred the top branches, and a cowbell tinkled from behind the barn.

The cabin door was open, but that didn't mean anything. Jot was so trusting he didn't have locks on his doors. This was Red River County, Texas—not the wide-open, movie-publicized plains of West Texas, but the northeast corner of the state, the poor piny-woods corner next to Louisiana and Arkansas. It was forest land, a country of a hundred years ago, a land of beaver dams and bobcats and deer and moonshine whiskey. People were friendly here, like Cousin Jot and his stupid dog—though even the people in Red River County thought Jot was half crazy.

They probably thought his dog was crazy too; and they probably were right.

Ron grimaced at the thought of living in that old cabin built by his grandparents. Bull Barton's hired killers would look for him first in Dallas, Houston, and New Orleans. When they didn't find him, if they were smart, they might track him back here, to his birthplace.

Jot Taylor stood suddenly in the open doorway, his thin face creased in an easygoing smile. Even in shadow, his lean face, high cheekbones, and high-arched nose gave Ron the feeling he was looking in a carnival mirror at a hillbilly caricature of himself. Back when they were kids, they'd fooled even Grandma when they switched clothes.

Jot's mouth opened wide. "I be damned! You're Ron!"

"Who else could I be?"

"Boy, you ain't been home for ten years! Where's your big Cadillac? Come in, Cousin, come on in!"

"I lost my Cadillac, Jot. All I got now is a Chevy." He didn't mention he'd sold a new car, sold it fast, and bought a battered secondhand Chevrolet because he wanted a car people wouldn't notice.

"Bad luck, huh? Don't fret, Cousin, don't fret. This here's your home long as you want to stay."

"Thanks, Jot."

"You still wearing fancy clothes, and there ain't no work blisters on your hands, so your luck can't be all bad. Down, Geronimo! Down, boy! Don't let him jump on your good suit that way, Cousin. Kick that fool dog outa the house and let's start in on this fruit jar of whiskey. Home-made, but it's smooth."

Jot sliced meat and fried potatoes and kept up his endless talk. Ron drank whiskey and leaned back in the big dirty chair that had been Grandpa's. He felt safe here for the first time in days, at least momentarily safe. He still had Bull Barton's money in his briefcase. Back in Dallas, the federal boys watched Barton day and night, watched every move he and his henchmen made. There was no way Barton could send one of his own men to Red River County to do a killing, so he had hired men from back East. They'd have photos and descriptions. All Ron's photos would show him clean-shaven and well dressed.

He would have to grow a beard, let his hair grow, part it in the middle and let it hang down old-fashioned, and meantime frame up on Jot, get him to shave close, dress in his clothes; if Jot wore Ron's clothes they'd kill Jot, thinking he was Ron. They'd report to Barton that he was dead, but they wouldn't be able to find the money. And with the federal boys breathing down his neck, Barton couldn't spend time looking for the money—he was mainly interested in having Ron killed as an example of what he'd do to a thief.

Jot flipped the meat in the skillet.

"Soon's we eat let's go to John's Place, drink a few beers, see who's there."

"Jot, I can't go anywhere. And you have to promise you won't tell anybody I'm here. Not anybody!"

"Not anybody?"

"Right."

"Oh—you're in trouble again."

"Bad trouble."

"Well, this is a good place to hide. Nearest neighbor's still three miles

of woods and two creek crossings away. These dirt roads are passable now, but you know what happens when it rains. Comes a rain, nobody gets in, nobody gets out. But you had to pass four houses after you turned off the highway, and maybe the women couldn't see your face with the car windows dusty and rolled up but you can bet everybody who saw your car is curious about a strange car on this road."

"I'll hide the car in the woods."

"Have to hide it good. Herb Kinrow is coming in a couple of weeks to help me dynamite stumps in the new ground. We'll have to be careful, Cousin. We can't be seen together. If one of us is outside, one has to stay in the house."

Geronimo whined and put his ugly head on Ron's lap. Jot looked at his dog and shook his head. "Damn! You used to get all the girls crazy about you, but I never knowed you to attract dogs."

Ron made himself scratch the dog's ears. "Jot, you loan me some of your work clothes and I'll give you this suit and shirt and tie. I have more clothes with me, and you can wear anything you want."

Jot placed supper on the table and lit a kerosene lamp. Ron shook his head. No running water, no electricity, no indoor bathroom, no TV. But if he could throw Barton off his trail, he could live in luxury later on with all the money in his briefcase.

Jot was still talking. "Won't do any good for me to wear them fine clothes you got. When me and you was growing up, the girls walked past me to get to hang onto you. I thought then that if you was gone, they'd like me. But after you left, the girls still didn't hang around me. Geronimo, get outa the house!"

The dog yawned, stretched, and trotted off with a shuffling, three-legged gait.

Ron smiled. "I'll show you how to get women, Cousin. I'll let you wear my clothes, I'll tell you what to say, and you'll get women like I do."

Geronimo came back, bringing a tattered leather work glove. He stood looking at Ron, then at Jot, then he placed the glove at Ron's feet.

Jot swore. "I be damned! That glove's his treasure, his plaything, and he usually brings it to me. Now he's picked you!"

A week later, Ron had all he could stand of being without TV or newspapers, with only Jot and the dog for company. He had dug a hole at the first opportunity and buried the briefcase. Five minutes later,

Geronimo laid the briefcase at his feet. He threw rocks at the dog, drove him into the woods, and buried the briefcase again, this time in an entirely different spot. While he stood mopping perspiration from his brow, Geronimo came bounding out of the woods and sent dirt flying in all directions as he dug up the briefcase again, and again laid it at Ron's feet.

After that, Ron put the briefcase under two feet of shelled corn in the seed bin. Slamming the lid shut, he kicked at the dog. "Darn you, now try to get it!" he challenged.

Geronimo shook his ugly head and walked off, defeated.

But Ron was bored, restless, on edge.

Jot decided he was worried. "Maybe nobody will come by," he said. "You got the wild willies, Ron, and you got to do something. You can help me clear the new ground, cut them trees, and get ready to dynamite the stumps."

"I'm not that desperate. Let me use your car and I'll go into Clarksville, get a good steak, talk to a waitress or two."

"Good idea. Hiding out like this is bad, Ron. The law must be really after you."

"I didn't say who's after me."

"Maybe a jealous husband, huh? I wish women fell for me the way they fall for you, Cousin."

Dressed in Jot's overalls and work shirt, a week's growth of beard on his face, Ron went to Clarksville. He was careful to walk with a slight slouch, hunching his shoulders like a man who was used to following a mule and double-shovel plow up and down corn rows.

A man passed, nodded. "Howdy, Jot."

Alps Café was long gone, but another place, Tracy's, was near the courthouse. A blonde waitress looked at him, shrugged, and took his order. Darn you, Ron thought, I come in dressed like Jot and you high-hat me. If I came in dressed like I do in Dallas, walking light and quick, you'd wiggle your cute tail and break out in a sunshine smile.

"Jot, you ever hear from your cousin?"

Ron looked up. It was Tom Gast, ten years older and thirty pounds heavier.

"Not much, Tom."

"Three men come in here yesterday asking about him."

"That so? He sent me a Christmas card last Christmas. Something on

the card about going to Denver or maybe San Francisco."

"The men said they was buying land around here, be here several days, and if anybody knew anything about old Ron Taylor, let them know. Said they was friends in Dallas at one time, and Ron had talked about Red River County. I didn't tell them where you live because them men looked like bill collectors to me. You know how Ron used to run up debts and never pay them."

Ron kept his voice indifferent. "Yeah. Well, nice seeing you, Tom."

He made himself eat casually, though the steak threatened to stick in his throat. He watched the door, genuinely afraid. After he paid the check he made himself walk lazily to Jot's car.

At the farm, he checked the feed bin. The briefcase was still buried under shelled corn. He walked to the far field, the new ground, where Jot was digging around a stump.

Jot wiped sweat from his face and rested on his shovel. "You feel better, Cousin?"

Rod grinned. "You lucky Casanova!"

"Who?"

"You. That waitress at Tracy's is just waiting for you to come back into town."

"What waitress?"

"She didn't give me her name because she thought I was you, thought I knew her. I started talking to her, kidding around, and she came on strong. She said there's a dance at Dimple tonight, and for me—thinking I was you, of course—to come back into town shaved and dressed for dancing. She gets off at four. Said we could go to Idabel over in Oklahoma for dinner and then come back to the dance or whatever we wanted to do."

"Aw, she didn't think you were me."

"She kept calling me Jot. Cross my heart! Listen, Jot, you been good to me. I didn't tell you I still got some money, but I do. Here, you take this fifty-dollar bill, you shave and dress up, and go on that date."

"I couldn't take your money, Ron."

"You take it. If anybody asks where you got the new clothes, tell them you got a savings account in another town. Now are you going to stand there or are you going to shave and bathe and go out after that cute little doll?"

Jot threw his shovel high in the air. "I'm moving, Cousin! I'm moving! You got her fire started, but I'll fan her flames!"

Just at sundown, with a lone blue patch of sky showing high above the pine tops and nothing but shadows around the cabin, Ron heard Jot's old car coming at high speed, and the smooth roar of another car behind it. There was a crash of a car hitting a tree, and shouts, then the blim! blim! blim! of a handgun.

Fifteen minutes later, a black Buick stopped on the road near the cabin. The driver stayed behind the wheel while two men got out and walked cautiously up the trail.

Ron wanted to run, but he told himself the best course was to keep up his disguise. He ambled toward the men, acting innocent and curious. "You fellows want something?"

One of the men was a slender albino who kept his hands in his coat pockets. The other man—large, resembling an ape—held a revolver in his right hand.

"We're federal agents," the albino said. "You're Ron Taylor's cousin?"

"I'm Jot Taylor. What's Ron up to? Is he O.K.? What's he done?"

"We tried to arrest him but he broke loose and led us a chase in his car. He wrecked it and ran into the woods."

So Jot was alive! And if these men caught him, he'd talk!

The albino looked around. "Joe, tell Merk to take the car down the road out of sight. Mr. Taylor, we must search your cabin. You will stay with us in the cabin, and you will be very quiet."

Joe hesitated. "Whitey, how do we know *this* one isn't Ron Taylor? Tall, slender, high cheekbones—he fits the description."

Geronimo whined and moved against Ron. Ron bent down and petted the mutt.

Whitey laughed. "The dog says this one is the farmer."

Geronimo growled as Joe shoved Ron into the cabin. "Careful with your dog, hillbilly," Joe warned. He stomped his foot, looked hard at Geronimo, and the dog howled and ran out of the house, his tail between his skinny legs.

As dusk gathered, Jot walked from the barn to the back of the cabin, Geronimo with him. Jot had one hand in the air and in the other he waved a briefcase.

"Let him come closer," Whitey commanded.

Jot stopped walking and put the briefcase down.

Whitey and Joe came out of the back door of the cabin, Ron with them.

They mustn't let him live, Ron thought. If Jot talked, he was dead. He raised his hands and waved. "Run! They'll kill you, Cousin! Run!"

Joe lashed out with his gun, hit Ron in the face, and knocked him down. Jot raised both hands high in the air.

Geronimo picked up the briefcase, ran with it to Ron, laid it at his feet, and looked up at him for praise.

Ron dived for the briefcase. All that money, that precious money! How had Jot found it? He opened it, saw the dynamite inside, the short fuse sputtering. Before he could run, before the other two men could move, there was a terrible explosion.

Poking around as the dust settled, Jot identified fragments of Geronimo. He regretted having used the dog that way. Geronimo had pointed that seed bin like a bird dog after a quail. All that money. Folks would come looking sooner or later and find the bodies. They'd conclude Jot Taylor and three unidentified men had been killed. But they wouldn't find the money, or anything to indicate Ron had been here. Including the Buick. Jot planned to drive it to Mexico and spend the money on señoritas and margaritas.

Yeah, old Geronimo had been a good dog in some respects. Unfaithful and disloyal—but he had been useful.

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Marion Wiley would never refuse to cooperate with the police . . .

A MATTER OF WITNESSES



by
**LAWRENCE
TREAT**

After almost sixty years of living in the same small house in Francesville, a house in which every stick of furniture went back at least three generations, Marion Wiley supposed she knew the town as well as anybody. Which, on this particular Thursday morning, helped her not one whit in writing her weekly column for the *Forsyth Register*.

She was a small, cheerful woman, as rich in mind as she was poor in worldly goods, and at the moment she owed exactly eighteen dollars.

And for Marion Wiley to owe more than a cent was as close to sinning as she'd ever come. Except, perhaps, for her flights of fancy in which she killed off half the people she disapproved of. The other half she forgave, and felt the better for it.

She'd often longed to slip a little malice into her column. Direct libel, however, was out of the question, for the paper would refuse to print it, and maybe fire her besides. Once she'd gone so far as to say that the Hammels had punished Phyllis again for staying out after eleven o'clock, and another time she'd told how old man Dagget always slipped a few choice items into his pocket when he went marketing at Olsen's. But she'd torn up the copy and shredded it before dropping it into the wicker wastepaper basket Captain Wiley had brought back with him from China over a hundred years ago.

Eighteen dollars. At ten cents a line that meant one hundred and eighty lines, and the stark fact was that this week there was no news. Absolutely none. Nobody had reported even a small, frivolous little item. The phone calls she'd made this morning had drawn a blank. She supposed there was nothing to do except go back to the previous weekend—to Harold Johnson.

She rolled a sheet of paper into her big, clattery, old-fashioned Royal and began tapping away. "Harold Johnson visited me again last week," she wrote. "As most of you know, Harold is an old friend of mine who comes to visit every once in a while. He's a mycologist, which means he knows all about mushrooms, particularly the wild, delicious ones.

"On Saturday afternoon we went to Low Hill Pond and gathered a whole basketful of mushrooms that, despite their long, difficult Latin names, were good to eat. Still, that wasn't enough for Harold. He had to leave me and go looking farther into the woods in the hope of finding something unusual, for the ambition of every real mycologist is to find a rare new species and have it named after him.

"Harold must have forgotten all about time, because . . ."

The words flowed now, and Marion pounded out her story in a crescendo of bangs that made her ancient machine clang and vibrate like a tank bouncing over a cobblestoned street. At the end of an hour she had her hundred and eighty lines, and finished them off with a couple of compliments for Harold. Then checked for the typos that always plagued her, folded the sheets, put them in an envelope, and addressed it to the *Register*. She mailed it that evening, and in due time she received a

check for eighteen dollars and forty cents. Marion Wiley was solvent, her reputation was saved, and she again felt secure in her place in Francesville society.

On the same evening Marion wrote her column about Harold Johnson, Willy Wharton, Chief of LePage County Police, sat down at his table in the Right Side Bar & Grill—Right Side meaning the right side of the state line where liquor taxes were cheaper—for his usual beer with Dan Moorhead, his counterpart in the adjacent Morgan County, across the state line.

Willy kept squirming and trying to adjust his bony bulk to the hard wooden bench, but it was made for ordinary people of ordinary size, and he was stuck with it. Dan, less angular than Willy and with more upholstery, watched the activity at the bar with pleasant complacency on his cherubic face. Since neither Willy nor Dan had anything important on his mind, they discussed run-of-the-mill, petty crime for a half hour or so, Willy with dry, homely wit, Dan embellishing it with the best words in the dictionary. Then Willy went home to his wife, Kate, and Dan returned to his bachelor quarters, where he read the encyclopedia until 1:00 A.M., then went to sleep.

About two weeks later Johnny Paulsen and Dorothy Boardman drove down to Francesville for a picnic at Dorothy's favorite spot on the shore of the lake. After they ate they went tramping through the woods. Dorothy's puppy, whose name was Charlie C., dug up something that set him barking furiously, and she and Johnny went over to investigate.

After a quick glance, Dorothy brought her hand to her mouth and said, "Oh!"

Johnny put his arm around her. "We'd better go back and report this to the police," he told her.

Chief Willy Wharton was notified at 1:00 P.M. He promptly informed the state police, who took care of sending for the medical examiner, technical experts, and an ambulance with a pair of stretcher bearers to remove the body. Johnny Paulsen, guiding Willy and Officer Robinson back to the site, almost lost his way. Still, Willy had time for a good look around before the rest of the crew arrived.

The body was that of a youngish woman, perhaps in her thirties. Her

skull had been smashed and she'd been stuffed into a shallow grave. The bloodstained rock with which she'd apparently been killed had come from a nearby stone wall that dated back to the days when the whole area had been farmland.

By 5:00 that afternoon Willy was back in his office, but he'd made small progress. Everything that might have identified the body had been removed. Willy had sent out her description on the teletype, but so far there had been no feedback. The M.E. estimated the woman had died several weeks before. A closer estimate depended on what the temperatures had been on the particular part of the small slope where she'd been buried. There had been local showers, but precisely where the rain had fallen and how much of the body had been uncovered at the time was guesswork.

Willy was on the phone with the forensic odontologist attached to the M.E.'s office when his wife, Kate, walked in. He waved a hand at her and watched her wander around his office while he finished his call. When he hung up, she was standing next to the window reading the *Register*.

"You heard?" Willy said.

"They told me outside. Not the details, of course, but—"

"There are no details," Willy said. "We don't even know who she was. That was the dental guy just now—maybe he can help."

Kate held up the paper. "Have you seen this?" she asked.

"What?"

"Somebody named Harold Johnson was wandering around the Low Pond area looking for mushrooms two weeks ago. Marion Wiley knows him."

Willy crossed the room and took the paper. While he was reading, Kate said, "I thought we'd have dinner at that new place on Route 18. I'll make reservations if you can tell me what time we eat."

"We don't," Willy said. "I've got to go see Marion and find out about this Johnson guy."

"But—"

"I'm sorry, hon," Willy said.

Marion Wiley had always been a particular friend of Willy's, partly because she had a smart mind and a sharp sense of humor, but mostly because she stood for something that was going out of fashion. She brought

the simplicity of an earlier time into the present, and Willy respected her for it.

Just inside the door of her house, she looked up at him and said, "Mr. Wharton, you've gotten taller—if possible."

He grinned down at her. "Half an inch a year, Miss Wiley. That's my aim."

"Marion," she said. She brought him into the parlor with the red carpeting and the lace curtains and the spindly, uncomfortable furniture that was too small and delicate for Willy. He was always afraid of breaking a leg in her house, he told her—not his, one on one of her chairs. She watched him lower himself carefully onto what looked like one of the sturdiest the Victorians had turned out. "Can I make you some tea, Willy?" she asked.

He shook his head. "No, thanks. Just tell me about Harold Johnson."

"Oh," she said, startled. "What about him?"

"Who is he?"

"A friend of mine."

"Where does he live?"

"I really don't know."

"He visited you a couple of weeks ago. You said so in your column. Where does he come from? Where does he live?"

"I don't know," she said, fidgeting. "Really I don't. You see, it's a peculiar relationship. He stops in once in a while. Sometimes he phones first, sometimes he doesn't."

"What kind of car does he have?"

"I've never noticed."

"Marion, stop holding out on me."

"Why are you asking?"

"You said in your column he was at Low Hill with you two weeks ago. Was he?"

"Yes, of course. What about it?"

"A woman was murdered there and I want to talk to Harold Johnson." Marion raised her small chin and spoke with defiance. "You can't."

"Why not?"

"Because I won't let you."

"I could take you to jail right now and hold you as a material witness."

"Willy, Harold Johnson didn't do anything wrong. He had nothing to do with a murder or any other crime. I know it. I swear it."

"So, where is he?"

"I can't tell you."

"Is he related to you?"

"I won't answer."

"You're an unreasonable, illogical, obstinate woman."

She settled back comfortably in her small green chair. "So I am," she said. "But I'm protecting someone very important to me."

"If I arrested you," Willy said, "it wouldn't do a damn bit of good. I couldn't scare you or use duress, and everybody in Francesville would hate me and clam up whenever I came around for the next few years. So—as one good friend to another—where in hell is Harold Johnson?"

"I don't *know* where in hell he is," she said, with a smile. "And if I knew, I wouldn't tell."

Willy discussed the problem with Dan Moorhead over their beer that evening.

"She's a tough little customer," Willy said. "Nobody except her or Kate would ever talk to me the way she did."

"Why is she holding out on you?"

"If I knew that, maybe I could crack the case."

"Any idea who the victim was yet?"

"No. I never paid much attention to Francesville and I don't have too many contacts there. Roger Boardman, Dorothy's father, owns half the town and all of the lake—Low Hill Pond, that is—and the other eight hundred people who live there just about scrape by and don't commit crimes or trespass on the Boardman property. That body could have stayed there for years if Dorothy Boardman hadn't decided to invite this Paulsen guy there for a picnic with her dog. Chances are the victim came from somewhere else."

"What was she killed with?" Dan asked.

"A rock."

"How was the grave dug?"

"A shovel. The marks are clear enough—but there's no shovel that I could find."

"So the perpetrator picked up a rock—the nearest thing handy, no malice aforethought—and after he killed her he went and got a shovel."

"Right. And that narrows it down to somebody who either lived nearby or knew where he could get hold of a shovel, and the only house in that

area belongs to Roger Boardman. So who is Harold Johnson?"

"There are more Johnsons than any other name," Dan said. "More than Smith or Jones."

"We had two of 'em for Presidents," Willy remarked.

"But this one's a mycologist," Dan said, "and he ought to be a member of NAMA, the North American Mycological Association." He frowned and dug into his memory, which was prodigious. "But he ain't," he said. "At least not from around here."

"You're a member?" Willy asked.

Dan settled back on the wooden bench. "Naturally," he said.

In the morning, Willy's staff visited the dentists in LePage County and showed them the chart of a thus-far-unidentified female. Around noon, Dr. Hans Leffler of North Merrick recognized it.

"That's Mrs. Daphne Holmes," he said. "She lives at Low Hill. Her husband's the caretaker for the Boardman estate."

At about the same time the bartender at Murray's, in Forsyth, the county seat, looked at a sketch the local police showed him and said it was a drawing of one of his customers.

"I don't know her name," he said, "but she came in here every once in a while. I heard people call her Daffy or Taffy, something like that. She was no pro—I don't let pros hang around here—but she usually left the place with somebody, and you could tell why."

At 1:00 P.M. Willy and Officers Robinson and Hammeyer drove out to the Boardman estate. Jake Holmes stalked out of the Boardman garage when he heard a car roll up the driveway. He wiped his right hand on his left-hand sleeve, leaving a grease mark there to keep company with a variety of other stains.

"Want something?" he asked, planting himself in front of the garage as if preparing to repel an attack.

"I'd like to speak to your wife," Willy said.

"She ain't here," Jake said.

"Where is she?"

"I don't know and I don't care."

"When did you last see her?"

"Haven't bothered to notice. What you want her for?"

"What did you fight about the last time you saw her?"

"The usual thing. Her running around."

"That last fight was worse than usual, wasn't it?"

"Nope. They were all pretty much the same. We yelled at each other for a while, then I slapped her around a little, and then she backed off."

"You got a shovel?" Willy asked.

"I had two of 'em. Busted one this morning, and damned if I can find the other."

"Let's see the busted one."

"Chief," Jake said, "you got something in mind besides borrowing a shovel. So what's happened?"

"You tell me."

"I can guess. Somebody knocked her off. Well, good riddance." Jake's eyes gleamed. "Chief, she had two thousand bucks salted away somewhere. You find it for me and I'll give you twenty bucks. How about it?"

"Let's see the shovel," Willy said.

That evening at the Right Side Bar & Grill, Willy let off a head of steam. "Dan," he said, "someday I want a nice clean homicide with nice clean people and a nice clean solution. But you take a victim like Daphne Holmes, who went with anybody who'd have her, who stole whatever she could get her hands on. Then you have a slob like Jake Holmes. The only reason Roger Boardman would possibly keep him is that he has something on Boardman. Boardman himself is in Chicago cooking up a complicated financial deal calculated to gyp as many people as he can. He hasn't been at Low Hill in over a month, so I can deal *him* in.

"I'd like to pin it on Jake, but if he'd done it he wouldn't admit he had a shovel missing and then say good riddance if she was dead. He's not smart enough to get away with a homicide and fool me. He could have done it, and he had plenty of reason for killing his wife, but I don't think he did. If he was going to kill her, he'd find out first where she kept her two thousand bucks. Which, with interest, is now two thousand eight hundred and seventy-six dollars and nine cents."

"You found it?"

"In your bailiwick, at the Morganville Savings and Loan."

"So where are you?"

"One of the guys she had something on must have met her at Low Hill Pond. She probably threatened him, and he went haywire, picked up a rock, and conked her. Then he went down to the house, found a shovel, and brought it back, dug a grave, and buried her. He threw the shovel

away someplace, maybe miles off. The trick is to find out who he was. After that, everything'll fall in place."

"What about Harold Johnson?"

"Dan, I've got the state police and a bunch of city departments and the FBI all looking for him. I sent out a Wanted and I got back a list of forty-seven Harold Johnsons in nineteen states that I ought to check up on. And you know what? I'm going home and get myself a good night's sleep. Then real early tomorrow I'm going to go see Marion. I'll bet she makes a good breakfast."

He was right about the breakfast. He feasted on corned-beef hash and good strong coffee. Then he pushed back his chair and said, "Marion, it's a shame to turn against somebody who's just fed me so well, but I got to find out about Harold Johnson."

"Not from me," she said.

Willy cocked his head to one side and said softly, "He an old flame of yours?"

"I won't answer that."

"I hear you had more boy friends than anybody else in Francesville. I hear they came calling one right after the other."

"Willy," she said, and her eyes danced mischievously, "there's nobody but you."

"Me and Harold?"

"No. Just you."

"I've been talking to Harold. He says he's been in love with you all his life."

She looked surprised, but she spoke seriously: "You're spoofing me, and you're not even doing it very well."

"You got me there," Willy said, "so let's get down to what I came for. Marion, we located Harold Johnson, but he claims he never saw you that weekend and certainly never went into the woods with you."

"That's right," she said quickly. "He never did."

"But he was here in Francesville, wasn't he?"

"Willy," she said, "maybe you have the wrong Harold Johnson."

"I don't think so. You see, I've been around a long time and I know that gag about two people getting together and saying they don't even know each other when they're really good friends. It's called giving an alibi."

"And Harold?" she said. "Let me see him. Let me see if you have the right man."

Willy burst out laughing. "Marion, it won't wash. You and I know there ain't no Harold Johnson, and never was. You made him up."

"Me?"

"Yes, you. Kate and I talked it over last night and decided you'd never refuse to cooperate with the police. It's just not like you. So, after kicking the idea around, we figured you'd made up the whole story. Seems you got a lively imagination and you just took off."

"What an absurd idea!"

"Harold Johnson never existed, and you had me and ten police departments spending all their time looking for him. Do you know how many thousands of dollars this little story of yours cost the taxpayers? Why did you do it?"

"I never thought it would make any difference."

"What were you after?"

She shook her head and began crying softly. "Willy, don't tell, please! All the *Register* pays me is ten cents a line, and I need the money. So when there's no news I make it up. Harold Johnson is one of the people I made up, but subscribers like to read about him. If the editor found out, he'd fire me. What harm is there in making up a story to amuse people with?"

"None," Willy said. "And it just goes to show that you got real writing talent. This little secret of yours won't go any further, Marion. And, what's more, I'm going to go along with it, because I got a hunch it can help me out."

It wasn't Willy's habit to hold press conferences. Instead, when Ron Dobney of the *Register* came by, Willy usually sat him down and gave him a pinch or two of news ahead of any formal statement. So when Ron breezed in around noon that day, he found Willy sitting in his chair that was tipped at a forty-five-degree angle and more or less anchored by the weight of Willy's heels, which were planted solidly on a notice-of-bankruptcy on his desk.

Willy waved Ron over to the big imitation-leather chair. "Sit down," he said. "I'm thinking."

Ron knew the procedure. Willy wouldn't have to ask that he not be quoted directly, but he'd give out a story of sorts. It was up to Ron to

check the facts. Sometimes he was being used, sometimes he was getting a scoop that he could send on to the wire service and collect some extra money.

Willy said, as if he were talking to himself, "This Daphne Holmes case—we got it mostly figured out. Seems that Harold Johnson picked her up one evening at Murray's. Johnson, he's a minister. You know, Ron, ministers are human. Some of 'em don't look it, but—" Willy frowned and went into a huddle with himself. "Poor guy," he said. "He spent the night with Daphne. Next day she met him in the woods. He thought they'd have themselves a time there, but instead she put the screws on him. She wanted money. They had a big argument, he lost his head, and—

"You know, Ron, I feel sorry for that poor guy. One false step." Willy's sigh blew a couple of papers off the desk, but he seemed not to notice. "I got a perfect case except for one thing. Nobody saw Johnson on Low Hill that day except Marion. But where did he go after she left him and how can I prove it without a witness? If I can find just one other person who saw Johnson on Low Hill on Saturday afternoon, September fifteenth, I've got my case. Just one witness, that's all. I have Johnson's picture right here, but I need that witness, and then they can bring Johnson down here and I charge him."

Ron stood up.

"Maybe somebody'll show up," he said.

It took a full day, but on the evening after Willy had leaked that bit of information to the *Register*, he was jubilant. He came grinning into the Right Side Bar & Grill and squeezed into the bench opposite Dan.

Neither of them spoke until they'd both had a good long gulp first of beer. Then Dan spoke up.

"I hear you got the Holmes case all sewed up."

"I make miracles," Willy said. "With the help of a couple of lies and some pretty bad ham-acting, I get results. So when this Johnny Paulsen said he'd seen Johnson on Low Hill that afternoon and identified the picture of the man I called Johnson, I had Paulsen cold. He'd have been glad to see somebody else convicted—he thought that would clear him—but he was admitting he'd been at Low Hill before. I had him in as tricky a lie as you'd want, and I didn't stop pouring it on until I had his confession.

"His motive, of course, was pretty obvious. He expected to marry Dorothy Boardman, and then this Daphne Hölmes threatens to break it up. So I just showed him a picture of somebody who looked like he could be a murderer, and Paulsen fell for it and practically hanged himself." With a sly expression on his battered face, Willy waited for Dan to ask the question. Dan did.

"Whose picture?" he said.

"Yours," Willy said, and burst out laughing.



Max was the shrewdest operator in London . . .

ROUGH JUSTICE

by
JUDY
CHARD



His boots slung round his neck, Johnnie French lowered himself hand over hand to the cell window below, jerking the rope free on the release knot which tied it, a trick taught him by an expert housebreaker. Then he fastened it to the cell bars and climbed to the next group of windows.

It took him twenty minutes to reach the ground, his weight swinging and banging him painfully against the side of the building. This was the worst part of the whole business and had had to be timed to the last

second, when he knew no guards would be in the yard below.

So far so good. His knees trembled as he reached the flagstones of the yard. A half moon rode the sky, covered by fitful clouds and a slight haze. Perfect for this type of getaway. The gods were on his side, he thought with rising jubilation.

Keeping in the shadow of the walls, he crept through the compound to the temporary shed set up to house the building tools. Forcing open the door, he took two planks of wood, propped them against the wall, and crawled up them and over the top.

He dropped onto the soft turf beneath the prison walls and quickly drew on his socks and boots. Behind him the buildings towered silent and brooding in the winter night, the scaffolding of the new wing stark against the luminosity of the sky.

He guessed it must be about an hour since he had left his cell. If his luck held, he had five hours before the dummy in his bed was discovered.

Tension momentarily relieved, he had a feeling of enormous elation. His heart beat as if it would burst, and he had a ridiculous desire to leap into the air, to shout, to laugh aloud. It had all been so easy. Much easier than he had dreamed possible, although he had to admit he never could have achieved it without Max's help. It proved the old saying that it isn't what you know but who you know that matters, especially when the "who" was someone with money and influence. A good boy, Maxie. He grinned to himself.

Still, he had to admit he was puzzled as to why Max had gone to this trouble to spring him. He had no special gifts that would be of use to Max in his empire of highly specialized crime—except for his driving, of course; he was an acknowledged ace behind the wheel. But so were a lot of other geysers who were still at large and didn't need money and trouble expended to secure their services. Yet word had come a few months before that Max wanted him out, that everything would be arranged down to the last detail—and when Max wanted something, he usually got it.

Now he could see the distant amber of a streetlamp. A truck lumbered by on the main road. The car was parked in the shadow of the pub wall with no lights. He had been told there would be a man and a woman in the back, masquerading as a courting couple if any nosy fuzz asked questions. He crept round behind it and gave three short raps on the back window.

The door opened and a man got out. It was no one Johnnie knew. As

the ignition key was put in his hand, he glanced over the man's shoulder at the girl, faintly visible, her hair gleaming in the light from the lamp. His heart lurched—it was red-gold, like Pammie's. For one wild moment he thought it was her, but when she spoke she had a cockney accent. Pammie had talked like a lady.

"For Chrissake get in," she hissed. "We're sitting ducks in this hole."

He slid into the driving seat, switched on the engine, and, letting out the clutch, moved swiftly and expertly away.

The road from the prison sloped down to the moor. Pale fingers of mist swirled round him as he peered through the damp windshield.

The man directed him to a small thicket, the trees making a dark tunnel, hiding the sky.

"Stop here, mate, and let us out. We got another car parked up the lane there." He thrust a parcel at Johnnie. "There's your gear with all the trimmings, driving license, and twenty quid from Max for expenses."

Johnnie turned to look at them as they got out but their faces were blurred, like pale flowers in the half light. "Thanks," he said shortly.

"Just part of the service. Hope your luck holds," the man said.

Like wraiths they were gone, swallowed up in the darkness. Quickly he changed his clothes, dumping his prison suit and boots in the ditch. Back in the car he drove swiftly, his lights dimmed. He'd be happier when he was off the moor and joined the main road. There he'd have nothing to fear. He knew his escape couldn't yet have been discovered or he would have heard the siren wailing its banshee notes over the stillness of the night. So as yet there would be no patrol cars with short-wave radios looking for him, no roadblocks. And the car was a common enough model not to arouse any special interest. Max was fly enough to have thought of that. Johnnie grinned to himself with satisfaction. He could be one of thousands of night travelers on the road.

He relaxed behind the wheel. It was good to be driving again, to be free. He'd done three years of the ten-year sentence. Although he'd taken no active part in the bank raid he'd been at the wheel of the getaway car, and it seemed that since capital punishment had been abolished, the beaks had turned spiteful and got stricter with lesser offenses.

There was a pack of cigarettes in the dash compartment and he lighted one, drawing the soothing nicotine deep into his lungs.

He'd heard there was talk of banning smoking in prisons as a deterrent to would-be criminals. That'd give the tobacco barons something to think

about. Still, he wasn't going to get caught again. He'd learned his lesson, and if, as seemed likely, he was going to be accepted into Max's setup, he'd be on pretty safe ground. Max was the shrewdest operator in London—in all of England, perhaps. It was strange, really; the more he thought about it, the less he could understand why Max should have arranged this little lot. It must have cost a packet; everyone involved had their price, and, like the cost of living, their terms rose all the time.

Still, why should he worry? Max obviously thought highly of him and had some special job in mind. Another train robbery maybe. He'd always wondered if Max had had a hand in that. Life looked rosy. Max was known to look after his "employees," just so long as they played straight with him.

The only fly in the ointment was Pammie.

She and Johnnie had had only a brief affair, but it had been like nothing else he'd ever experienced. He'd never met a girl like her. She had class, style, everything—and, apart from her faultless looks, she had that intangible gift of making you feel you were the only person in the world who mattered.

It had been high summer when they met. He was flush from a recent job. At a rather boring party in Chelsea, like the song said, he saw her across a crowded room, talking to their host. Johnnie drifted over and was introduced. She seemed to be on her own. She had enormous eyes, hazel with little gold flecks—like sunshine in a cool wood, he'd thought, with a sudden poetic flash. Pammie made him feel like that.

They'd agreed London in August was stuffy and dirty. They'd made small talk. But all the time he was conscious of the current that passed between them, sizzling like summer lightning.

"I'd give anything to get out of this, lie on a beach, swim in cool blue water, and drink champagne," she said, looking at him over the rim of her glass as they stood crushed together in the hot room.

He'd had a sudden vision of smooth shining sands ending in sea like crumpled silver tinfoil, of wheeling gulls and Pammie in a very brief bikini. "The Jag's outside. Let's go," he said.

"I believe you really mean it!"

He nodded. "Come on. We can collect whatever you need on the way and be at the coast before breakfast."

She'd gone without a backward glance.

They had a suite at the best hotel, with a balcony overlooking the sea

where they lay until their bodies had taken on an even, golden tan. The days had been long, hot, and sun-filled, the nights all too short.

They had drunk enough champagne to float a battleship. Nothing had been too good for Pammie. He bought her presents—filmy undies, a tiny diamond-studded watch, and a gold ankle bracelet with their initials entwined on a heart-shaped shield, which she'd made him fasten on himself.

It wasn't until they were driving reluctantly back to London, Johnnie's money exhausted, that she told him she was Max's girl.

For a moment his blood had run cold. It was as if an icy hand had run chill fingers down his spine. Max had a reputation for keeping his women exclusive. Unpleasant things had been known to happen to those who horned in on his preserves. But when he'd remarked on this to Pammie she'd given him her special smile and told him not to worry. She had as much if not more to lose if Max ever found out. Anyway, Max was in Mexico, the headquarters of his drug business, and none of his crowd would have seen them together.

Soon after that, Johnnie had got his sentence. He'd often thought about Pammie and wondered if she was still Max's girl. People said there were as good fish in the sea as ever came out. Maybe they were right, but they weren't the same fish by a long chalk. He mashed out his cigarette. He'd cross that bridge when he got to it.

He was reaching the suburbs of London now. The early-morning news on the car radio made no mention of an escaped prisoner. His luck was holding.

There wasn't much traffic about—a few milk floats, some long-distance vans. He couldn't have said what it was that gave him the first prickle of uneasiness. It was hardly a strong enough feeling to be called fear.

The streets were waking to a grey wet dawn. Newspapers and empty cigarette packs blew in the gutters. It was as he came to a halt at the first set of traffic signals that he noticed the cream mini in his driving mirror.

It followed as he turned left—not too close, but he had the feeling he was being tailed. He didn't know the area well and the one-way system was strange to him; he didn't want to risk taking evasive action. He shook himself. Nerves, he told himself. It was probably sheer coincidence.

He stopped again as the lights turned red. The mini was still behind him. He could see the driver. He almost laughed with relief. Nothing

very sinister about her—a young girl with long shining hair and no makeup. He whistled a ballad softly as he changed gear and moved smoothly off with the green light.

It was about two miles further on, at a road junction, that it happened.

He didn't see the big Merc until the last moment. It shot like an arrow from a side turning, missing him by a coat of paint as he jammed on his brakes, curses streaming from his lips. His tires screamed protest as they locked on the greasy, wet tarmac and he felt the impact as the mini crashed into him.

He cursed again, torn between the automatic reaction of immediate flight or stopping for the inevitable exchange of names and addresses. He was adequately equipped to deal with this, but it would bring him into unwelcome limelight. His mind was made up for him as a police car slid across his bow, siren screaming, blue light flashing. Behind him, the girl had got out of the mini and stood looking at the two cars, their bumpers interlocked.

Johnnie gave smooth answers to the questions, produced the driving license and insurance certificate. The policemen wrote down the details as he explained about the Merc that had caused the trouble. The girl confirmed she'd seen the car too but hadn't had time to miss Johnnie's car. She seemed remarkably cool, her eyes watching Johnnie with a kind of detached amusement he found irritating.

He bent down. "I think between us," he told one of the policemen, "we can unlock these bumpers and be on our way." A small crowd had gathered, pushing and shoving to get a view of what had happened.

As the policeman helped him lift the mini's bumper off the back of his car, Johnnie heard a click as the dented boot burst open. The impact had evidently broken the lock. He swung round to close it, his hand outstretched, and a woman in the crowd let out a scream.

Johnnie stood transfixed, watching in horrified fascination as the policeman moved forward.

Huddled in the small boot space was the body of a woman, her open, sightless eyes staring at them, her lips curled back over her teeth in the ghastly travesty of a grin. Round her ankle was a small gold chain bearing a heart-shaped shield.

Johnnie knew what was engraved on it.

LETTERS



I have been a fan of *AHMM* since I bought my first issue in October 1969. I have saved every issue but there is one I can no longer find, the March 1974 issue. If any reader has that copy and would like to arrange a sale or trade, please contact me.

Ronald M. Breznay
359 Kossack Street
Swoyersville, Pennsylvania 18704

I have enjoyed *AHMM* for several years . . . but the last issue left me disappointed. It was the first time I ever caught *two* gaffes in one issue. In "A Slip of the Lip," the author has Harry Boswell playing clarinet, sax, flageolet, *and* trumpet and describes him as a woodwind specialist. The trumpet is a brass and I very much doubt that a woodwind specialist would have the "lip" or the lungs for it.

Gaffe number two occurs in "Sweetheart, I'm Dry!" There is no such thing as a career Navy man, of whatever vintage, who cannot swim. Navy inductees are taught to swim, if they don't know how, during boot camp and are sent packing if they can't learn.

L. F. James does his homework thoroughly. His gun stories are good.

Margaret A. Hatfield
Delbarton, West Virginia

I can't believe you were that disappointed with the January 30 issue; after all, it did include the first Letters column.—S.C.G.

I am an unpublished writer trying to break into the field. So far I have sent seven submissions to your magazine and they have all been rejected. Surely you can encourage [new writers] by telling them exactly why a story was rejected. I realize that the editor has a lot of manuscripts to read every day and can't take time out for a personal letter, but surely some rubber stamps could be made up so that the editor can stamp on the hated rejection slip: PLOT TOO THIN, BADLY WRITTEN, IMITATIVE, or something like that.

Barbara Peterson
- Frazee, Minnesota

As far as is possible, we try to comment on manuscripts we think have some promise. I can't help feeling that your rubber-stamp idea would draw more anger at rejection than even the printed card. Remember, the best professional writers get rejected too. And one editor's reaction to a story is not necessarily another's. Negative comments might discourage a writer from sending his story elsewhere, where it might sell exactly as it is.—S.C.G.

I'd like to know something about L. F. James, who wrote "Hangfire," "The Gun Collector," and "Leo Browne's Arrest." He or she seems to know a lot about guns. Does this writer live in a rural area? Is he or she a former detective or a blind person?

Julia Lanier Teibel
Bronx, New York

L. F. James is the pseudonym of a male writer who lives in New York City. He has never worked as a private detective, nor is he blind. Besides writing, Mr. James is a psychotherapist. He teaches, lectures, and treats individual clients in that field.—S.C.G.

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(Continued on page 127)

There are places in the hills where nothing human has ever been . . .

CAT DANCE

by VIRGINIA LAYEFSKY



I'm not saying it wasn't an absolutely horrible thing to have happen to anyone. All I'm saying is I can bear the thought of it having happened to her better than if it had been anyone else. Or to some poor animal—a deer, for instance.

The thing is, since you've been away for the last couple of weeks, you didn't meet her. If it had been you who'd checked out her groceries, instead of me and had—*experienced*—the lady, I wouldn't have to explain.

The first time any of us saw her was two weeks ago Monday. She drove up to the store after dark, when we were about ready to close. Parked right out in front next to Hot Shot's pick-up—you've no idea how bad that old truck of his or any of the other cars around here looked next to what *she* was driving. Which was a brand-new grey Mercedes.

Then Jack and Worthy and some down-and-out shepherd-type mutt were hanging out around the front door like they do, barking and chasing cars and making fools of themselves. It had been raining as usual all day so they were all wet and muddy, and in the dark they looked as big as wolves. Of course none of them would hurt a newborn kitten, but who would know to look at them? And she *did* have to pass them to get into the store.

When she had, she was not looking pleased. She stood where you are now, by the paperbacks, in straight-legged pastel jeans and a simple little cost-the-earth suede jacket, looking over Ed's big beautiful supermarket and the collection of simple rustics who were shopping in it with the expression you sometimes see on adolescent faces: the Norman princess looking at Saxon serfs she is about to order flogged. The look is offensive enough in the young, but this lady was thirty-five if she was a day. Good-looking, but with a hard eye.

We all stared back at her. It's not often you get a chance to see pure arrogance in pink designer pants around here.

As it happened, all our best people chanced to be around that night. Gloria, drunker than usual, weaving toward the wine section with her grocery cart—Jim's left her for good again. Some Indian woman nobody knew with long black hair, a fringed jacket, and mammoth-sized jeans, who had obviously got her high from the same source as poor Gloria. Old Jensen, who'd forgotten to zip up his fly again, cursing the government out across the store to Ed.

And then there was Beaver Ohlberg and Cassie, with the baby in the grocery cart. The baby had chocolate cracker crumbs all over its face and looked gigantic while Cassie, without makeup and well rained on, looked like some fourteen-year-old child bride. As for Beaver, he'd come straight from the shake mill so he was wearing his ragged jeans and logging boots plus a pair of really ignorant-looking bright-red suspenders. With that long blond hair and those cheekbones and wild eyes of his he looked like some crazy Viking. Virile, you know, but not too bright.

On the other hand, the supermarket looked great. Ed had the Muzak

going, which I thought might reassure her a bit—let her know we weren't as backwoods as we seemed. But it didn't.

She looked us over fairly briefly but the message she sent out was loud and clear. Food stamps, those pale-blue eyes of hers said, common law, welfare, habitual rural-type incest with a high local incidence of feeble-mindedness and criminal insanity. The Jukes and the Kallikaks. Mass extermination the only answer. After which verdict she put a hand on a grocery cart as if it might carry bubonic plague and pushed off toward the dairy case. She was wearing beautiful high-heeled boots that made nasty, brisk clicking sounds when she walked.

Now comes the humiliating part—though I'm not sure which embarrasses me most, the way I acted or the way *she* acted. By the time she collected her groceries and was facing me over the checkout counter, I had begun to react to her reaction. The way she had ex'd us all out was having a terrible effect on me. To say my ego was awake and howling from malnutrition about wraps it up. I was shameless. I wished I was wearing a sign with letters a foot high saying I'd graduated from college with honors, that my paper on Fuseli had actually been published, that the captain of the football varsity had once asked me out, and that I had an appointment to have my hair cut next Friday. Not that I wasn't perfectly aware that none of those things would have mattered to someone like her.

I checked out her groceries in what might be called a burning silence. She looked at me for the merest instant. Trailer camp, her eyes said, awful hair. She looked away, ignoring me even as she handed me her check.

Until then, until I looked at the check, she had been a bitch, of course, but an ephemeral bitch—nobody, really. Then to see *Doug's* name, Douglas and Marion Forster, printed on the face of it! Sweet, wonderful Doug. And to realize this was what he had married. After Julie, the best and the brightest when she was alive. It brought him right back. After all, how long has he been dead? Six weeks? And I could just *see* him, the way he used to come in with his Doug kind of smile and say all those funny, sardonic things. It made tears come to my eyes. It made me say, since she was pulling yards of credit cards from her fat little wallet, that that wasn't necessary. It also made me add in what I've blushed to think of since as a sickening gush of sentiment, spoken in an absurd quavering voice, that we all knew Doug around here and loved him very much.

We were shocked and grieved by the plane crash. Then I waited. Shy, you know, the way you are after being sincere with strangers, but somehow warmed by having said it.

What happened was nothing. I couldn't believe it at first. But then, after a full moment or two, I realized she planned to ignore me, I was someone not worth acknowledging with the most primitive civility—a clod, a peasant, a stone that had spoken.

I bagged her groceries in an absolute rage. I hated her. And then—still looking through me—she asked in this cold, empty little Eastern Seaboard voice how far the Forster property was located from the store.

If you mean Doug's *shack*, I said, it's about five miles back in the woods. Keep going north and turn on the first dirt road to your right. You can't miss it. It's the only house around for miles. The electricity may not be working, I added—there was a storm last week—but she didn't have to worry, most of the bears were still hibernating and that man who had killed the two girls up the road last week was probably halfway to Oregon by this time.

She didn't trouble herself to thank me. She walked out of the store with her beautiful boots making definite, purposeful clicks as she went.

I thought of her driving up there among them, and the way they seem to come down like an army in their thousands on dark days like that one. From the foothills of the mountains you can't even see in the rain. All those evergreens so black and tall—fir and spruce, cedar and pine—beautiful enough as separate objects, but all together, if you look in there, down those dim endless aisles where the sun never comes, and begin to think of those lonely places way back up there where nothing human has ever been and maybe never will be—those miles upon miles of nothing but grey-green half light with the raindrops on moss and pine needles with no one to hear them—you begin to understand the frightfulness of those untouched places. You begin to wonder if maybe deep back in there there might be something that *does* hear the rain, that takes shape, that moves—and if you're alone in the woods, thinking that way, you do what Gus Larson did. Gus must have run for miles, they said, before he smashed his skull against a tree. And he never touched a drop of liquor in his life. According to the stories he wasn't the first to run himself to death out there in the trees either. Not that what happened to *her* in the end wasn't worse, or that I seriously wanted the trees to get her at the time, but I did sincerely hope the lights in the shack would be off.

Anyhow, Tuesday, the next day, was divine. The sun was out, the sky was blue, and the air smelled like the inside of a cedar chest. Everyone was in a good mood. Tom Spence stopped in the store to give me half of a salmon he'd just caught. Frances said she'd take the shepherd mutt that had been hanging around since Saturday, obviously dumped from a car, even if she already had three dogs of her own. I found the first wild strawberries of the season. And none of us saw or heard anything of the lady in question at all.

But Wednesday was a different proposition altogether. It rained again, steadily, all day. About noon Tanya—you know, the big black dog belonged to Judd—was killed by a truck right in front of the store. And we heard of the lady again.

It seemed that on Wednesday she had been busy indeed. Driving here, there, and everywhere, including the county seat. It didn't take us long to find out what she was up to since the first person she'd gone to see that day was Bill—not Bill Nördstrom, Bill the sheriff.

We could see the minute he walked into the store that day, before he so much as opened his mouth, that he was furious. You know how Bill gets—quiet. But he was willing to tell us about it—and he had quite a few interested listeners. It went like this.

On Tuesday, it being the glorious day it was, the lady apparently elected to walk around her inherited acres, probably counting the trees as she went. She must have ventured deep into the woods because, as luck would have it, she stumbled upon that tumbled-down shack out there, the one near the deserted shake mill. The place is a wreck, but it is on Doug's property.

Having found it, she also discovered old Ginna living in it. With her forty or so cats.

From what Bill said, Ginna and the lady had words. Now, for sheer bitchiness the lady must have had the advantage, but on the other hand old Ginna has a few salty turns of speech of her own—and to a stranger's eyes she must be something of an apparition. I mean with all that ancientness and having only one eye and insisting like she does on wearing that little old fur parka Ursula Hall outgrew three years ago, night and day. With the hood up.

At any rate, it seems the lady told Ginna she'd have to get out of the

shack and if she had noplacē to go she personally would see to it that she was put in an institution. Bill said old Ginna threw a bone at her and chased her out of the clearing—winning the battle, but not the war.

The lady came to Bill the next morning and told him she wanted Ginna evicted that very day. And she wanted Bill—*Bill!*—to take his gun and go out there and shoot every one of those cats right away.

Bill claims he kept his temper and tried to reason with her. He said he told her Ginna was harmless, that she had no money to speak of and no relatives left. She would have noplacē to go. The lady said that was no concern of hers. Bill said he asked if the reason she wanted her off the property was because she was thinking of selling it, but she said no, she just wanted her out, and the cats destroyed, that day.

Well, Bill says he flat-out refused to go kitten hunting and that he really didn't know what she could do about the old woman. Whereupon she said *she* knew what she could do if he didn't, which was to get a court order. And if he wouldn't shoot the cats she'd find someone who would.

We saw her drive past the store several times that day, hell-bent for somewhere. All of us at the store, plus whoever came, held indignation meetings all day long. Beaver got so mad talking about it he began to say he'd kill her.

The only one who seemed unmoved was Helga Engstrand, which surprised me. After all, she's the only woman around here nearly as old as Ginna. They grew up together and have known each other all their lives.

But all Helga did was say to Cassie, who happened to be standing beside her, that the woman was making a fatal error by bothering Ginna, especially since she was a woman who obviously hated cats. Then she changed the subject to something else, as if it wasn't worth talking about.

Well, that was the night of the storm. With the water and lights off most of the night and about a foot of water in the store the next morning, our minds were elsewhere. I doubt if any of us thought any more about it until the following day, Friday, when she came into the store again.

She was still wearing the beautiful boots but she'd changed the pink pants to blue jeans and had left her arrogance at home with her makeup.

She picked out some groceries but I noticed she hung back until I'd checked out the only other customer in the store. It was as if she'd been waiting until we were alone. Her eyes hadn't changed—they were every bit as cold and self-seeking as before—but she looked tired and wretched,

the way someone does who's been awake all night and is under a nervous strain. She looked desperate to talk to someone—or maybe just to hear another human voice.

Out of a sort of animal sympathy I said, "Quite a storm we had last night."

She looked at me directly, as if at last I existed, if temporarily. And only as a source of information, as I promptly discovered.

"Do you know anything about cats?" she asked in her cold little voice.

"Something," I said warily.

"How do you get rid of one?" she said.

"What do you mean?" I asked her roughly. "You mean, kill it?"

"There's a cat," she said. Her voice shook. I saw that her hand and the wallet in it were shaking a little too. "At my cabin. It got in last night. I can't get rid of it."

I shrugged indifferently and turned away in as elaborate an imitation of a loutish local as I could manage.

"We have a cat problem here," I told her over my shoulder. "It's probably hungry. Why don't you just feed it as long as you're around and then forget about it?"

"I hate cats," she said.

"Then toss it out," I advised her.

She said I didn't understand, and sounded so odd I looked at her again. She had gone dead white with the greenish undertone of someone about to be very ill.

"I'm afraid of it," she said.

If it had been anyone else I'd have been more sympathetic, but I said, a bit contemptuously, "Then don't let it in. Keep your doors closed."

"It gets in anyway," she said.

"What?" I asked her.

"It gets in," she said. "It won't leave me alone."

She first saw it, she said, on Wednesday night. Sometime in the dead of night she had awakened and walked to the bathroom in the dark. When she turned on the light, it was there, crouching on a chest of drawers—a long young black-and-white cat, sleek and flat-skulled, with an odd white marking like a little moustache over its mouth, and skittish, rather wild yellow eyes.

She didn't know how it had got in. But although she disliked the idea of it being there, she wasn't particularly alarmed until she sat on the john

and it jumped up on her lap and began to purr, pushing its head against her and kneading its claws into her bare thighs. More than anything—more than the animal heat, the suggestion of a sensuality so intense as to be almost sexual—it was the appalling familiarity of the animal that disturbed her. She leapt to her feet, knocking it to the floor. It ran between her legs as she made her way to the darkened kitchen.

She turned on all the lights. She tried to chase it out, but it was quick and cunning. It ran out of her reach under the furniture, then out again to bite her ankles. At last, though utterly unnerved, she managed to grab it by the skin at the back of its neck and throw it out the front door.

The next day she caught glimpses of it off and on around the place, but it kept its distance. She tried to find the hole it had come in by. The only one she found was in the bathroom floor under the chest of drawers. She dragged a heavy metal tool box into the bathroom and set it over the hole. It fit perfectly. She felt secure.

But that night she woke again to the sound of the rain—and of something heavy being moved. It couldn't be the tool box—it was too heavy—but she began to be afraid. She comforted herself with the knowledge if the cat had somehow gotten into the bathroom, the door was closed.

Then, there in the dark, she heard purring, felt the springs at the foot of her bed give lightly, and it was with her again, nuzzling her neck. She jumped up, screaming, and grabbed the light.

This time when she tried to chase it out, it hissed at her. She was afraid to go near it and afraid to go back to bed for fear it would come to her.

She sat up on the living room sofa. The cat crouched under a chair watching her. At times it began to purr and come toward her cautiously, but when she moved defensively it ran back to its safe vantage place.

Once during the long night she thought of poison. It took all her courage to move to the kitchen, but she did. She put rat poison in a bowl of milk while the cat watched from the living room. It never went near the bowl.

Toward daybreak there was a frightful interlude. It played. It found a scrap of paper on the floor. It tapped at it with its paws, gently at first, then faster and more intensely until it was leaping and whirling about the floor on its hind legs in a kind of wild cat dance while she watched, too horrified to move.

But the really frightful thing, she said, was that as it danced *it watched her over its shoulder.*

At first light she broke for the door and ran from the house. The cat chased her, biting at her ankles and tripping her. She fell but she finally made it to the car and drove away—aimlessly at first, not knowing what to do, then to the store.

I heard her out; I thought she was exaggerating the whole thing, but she looked so awful I acted more patient than I felt.

"I don't know what to do," she said.

"Go back," I told her. "Get your things and leave."

"I'm afraid it'll still be there," she said.

"It's only a *cat*," I said.

"It's after me," she insisted. "I'm afraid of it."

"Then drive back home," I told her. "Come back some other time and get your things."

Scared sick as she was, her eyes hardened when I said that. "I won't do that," she said. "The cabin isn't locked. Somebody could come in and steal everything."

Have it your own way, I thought.

She hesitated a while longer as if she wanted to say more—perhaps ask me to go back there with her—but then she turned and left the store.

When I remember what a good time I had the rest of the day telling everybody about it and how we all laughed, I must admit I feel ashamed. Donnie, Mary's oldest, told me he saw her later in the afternoon crashing through the woods up near Cripple Creek, carrying a big stick. He said she was running deeper and deeper into the woods and was too far away to hear him if he called—and anyway he thought she was running for fun, playing some sort of game with a big black-and-white cat that was running along by her side.

They didn't find her until four days after they started looking. Bill said it was more good luck than good management that they found her at all. She could have lain at the bottom of that old dry well for years without anybody thinking to look. The terrible thing is, Bill said, she probably didn't die right away. She could have been lying down there alive for days. Though she had been dead a while when they found her.

How she managed to fall down there—covered the way it is by a huge blackberry patch—is beyond me. She must have had to fight her way in. She was all scratched and torn when they found her.

You've got to promise you won't tell this around. You know how Mary

and the others build things up. But the day after they found her, old Helga Engstrand came into the store. Said she needed three dozen Mason jars, though I can't imagine what she thinks she's going to can before June. Anyway, we began to talk about what happened. There were just the two of us here. I asked if she'd heard about it.

She nodded and smiled in that placid way some old people have. Oh, yes, she said, she'd heard about it. But she hadn't been surprised. That lady should never have bothered Ginna, she said. Not a lady who hated cats like she did. Because, though nobody was old enough to remember, Ginna's father had been an Indian. And her mother hadn't been a Swede or a Norwegian like most of the folks around here—she'd been a Finn. Couldn't hardly talk a word of English. And everybody knew Finns were different. They remembered a lot of the Old Ways. And Ginna's mother had taught Ginna what she knew from the very beginning. The wonder was, Helga said, that worse things hadn't happened.

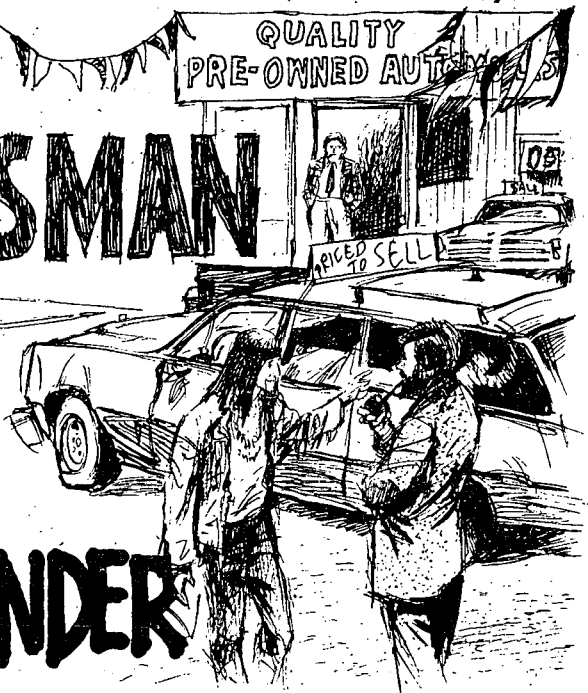
Well—in a week everybody will have stopped talking about it. The tourist season will be starting and she'll be just another story around here. I know what happened was a terrible thing. But that's all I know. Except that I'm not going within five miles of Doug Forster's cabin for a good long time. If that's ignorant, as I suspect it is, just call me credulous. I won't mind.



Toby Baxter had the secret about how to move the merchandise . . .

TOP SALESMAN

by
GARY ALEXANDER



Twenty-five years in this business and you'd think I'd have seen it all—including ten years in and around L.A., about which I could tell you stories that would make you gag. Anyway, Chick Chipperfield is my name; quality pre-owned automobiles are my game. See, I've got this new salesman named Toby Baxter, and in his two weeks in the employ of Chick Chipperfield's Automotive Elegance he's moved every unit he's shown that runs, and even some that don't.

I've got to back up here for a minute, provided this will be off the record. I'll be the first to admit that the name of my place is a little pretentious. What I have is a wholesale lot, actually. My inventory is mostly trade-ins the new-car dealers don't want on their used-car lots. Maybe they're not quite as young as they used to be and sometimes they have a few problems—you know, like terminal rust and a puff or two of blue smoke when you step down on the gas. Those new-car dealers, those crooks further up the street, call my store a "beater lot." I used to be kind of sensitive about that but not any more. Not since I hired Toby.

The amazing thing is, he doesn't even look like a sales professional. I have maybe (I'm not bragging, I've been told) the snazziest wardrobe on Auto Row, heavily accented toward purples and greens, checks and stripes, but don't write me off as a snob. It's just that Toby looks like a damn scruffy hippie. His hair is longer than both my daughters' combined. He wears beads and sandals, and when he bothers to show up in a jacket it's buckskin that Dan'l Boone himself probably brought down. But can he move the merchandise!

Like just this morning—I had this '67 Olds wagon I took in as a token trade. It had been sitting in the back of the lot for weeks, a real gunboat, it blew so much smoke you could use it as a smudge pot. The tires were so bald they were nearly transparent. The body was about as straight as an Egyptian tank's. You get the picture, I think.

So this guy wheeled in driving a restored Austin-Healey. He wasn't your basic turkey either. He looked like a college professor or something, with his tweeds and a pipe. Seemed that he wanted to surprise Momma with a car of her own.

Well, I can spot a guy like that from sixty paces. Takes him three days to decide whether or not to buy a pack of Doublemint. Lots of mumbling and intellectual doubletalk and quizzical frowns. A big waste of time.

I sicced Toby on him. Earlier I'd told him that if the Olds wagon wasn't moved today I'd call Al's Auto Wrecking and have Al haul it away and put it to sleep.

Toby waltzed the prospect over to the clunker. They circled it a couple of times, kicked a tire or two, then went into the office. Five minutes later, Toby had his check for \$595.00 plus tax and license and the professor was beaming from ear to ear like a proud papa, that meerschaum pipe of his stoking like a blast furnace.

I'd never before asked Toby how he did it, figuring it was beginner's luck. There was no prior sales experience on his application and I had hired him out of desperation. The day he came in, my other two salesmen didn't. They both had problems with the Monday-morning flu. But now I was starting to get very curious—and worried too. As soon as he found out how good he really was he'd be going up the street to sign on with one of those crooks.

Losing Toby was inevitable but I didn't see any reason for him to take his secret along, so I invited him out to dinner. On me. He didn't exactly fall on his knees in gratitude—we've probably said a total of twenty words to each other that didn't have to do with the car business—but he agreed to go.

There's this restaurant a couple of blocks up in the shopping mall that's pure class. It's all laid out with dark paneling, Naugahyde, and fake lanterns. The steaks are big, the drinks stiff, the waitresses stacked. I was afraid Baxter might turn out to be a vegetarian teetotaler, and sprouts and carrot juice weren't on the menu. No sweat though. He knocked down Scotch older than himself and dove into a sixteen-ounce sirloin like a refugee right off the boat.

The bartender was a close personal friend of mine, so I got him to load up Toby's drinks. After the proper amount of lubrication, I asked him, "How do you do it?"

"Do what?"

"C'mon, Toby. You come in to me off the street without a day's experience in sales. In two weeks, you're all-world. There's got to be a trick to it. What do you do, lay a .45 down by the contract?"

"I've been out of the country for some years, Chick," he said seriously. "I just returned. Most of my time was spent in the East—India, Burma, Nepal, Kashmir. I left the States during Vietnam. Like many of my friends I was pretty confused at the time, searching for some answers."

I knew he was a draft dodger but I kept my mouth shut. I was thinking about Toby's last sale of the day, to a squirrely kid who was hunting for a zillion-horsepower Corvette. Somehow Toby had talked him into a six-cylinder Dodge.

"The climate here eventually changed," he continued. "My friends and I were getting older. Some of them came back, and they're probably accountants or insurance agents now. I stayed on for a while."

"Did you ever find those answers?"

Toby leaned forward unsteadily. I had managed to get him half looped. "Have you ever heard of the Swami Rapholan Kharmejoranide?"

"It doesn't ring a bell."

"Chick, he's the wisest man on the face of the earth. I studied with him for three years at his monastery in the foothills of the Himalayas. One of his teachings involves a technique of persuasion unknown in the West. The Enlightened One believes that if people were more like-minded the world would be a far more tranquil place."

We were getting to the bottom line. I signaled the bartender to bring another round.

"I'm all for world peace," I said.

"I brought the technique to you, Chick, to test it. If it would sell defective used cars it would work in any circumstance."

Considering all the anti-freeze in his system now, I wasn't too offended by the remark. "Are we talking about hypnosis, where you dangle a pocket watch in front of the customer's nose and convince him that burning a quart of oil every two hundred miles isn't such a bad thing?"

Toby laughed. "Not exactly. It's more the projection of a spiritual commonality, where the hard edges of opinion are smoothed off. Brother can more easily become brother."

I had no idea what he was babbling about. "How about the nuts and bolts of the thing? How does it work?"

"It's a simple method to learn, very difficult to master. Physically, it's nothing more than a tonal quality in the voice coordinated with a series of hand gestures. But there must be a commitment, an intensity that's intangible. It's not as mechanical as it seems."

"I'm a quick read, Toby. Why don't you run me through it and see what happens?"

"I'm sorry, Chick. The Enlightened One will not allow it to be taught as part of a commercial venture. He would disapprove mightily if he knew I was using it on your car lot. In fact, it's time I moved on. I have enough money now to set up a foundation, as the Enlightened One wishes, to offer my knowledge for strictly selfless reasons."

I'm a cool customer, you know—not one to panic—but all of a sudden the room was full of red flares and they were coming from the top of my head. Sure as hell one of those crooks up the road had gotten to him and this was his way of quitting on me.

"The world's also got a right to buy cars from Chick Chipperfield's Automotive Elegance, Toby," I said.

Toby shrugged his shoulders and started to get up. "I'm sorry, Chick. It's a special gift. I can't misuse it any longer."

I anchored his wrist to the table and he came back down. "Maybe the District Attorney and the bunco squad would like to know about your 'gift.' It's still hypnosis of some sort no matter how you wrap it. Whether you're selling Buicks or salvation, there are some rules you gotta play by."

Toby was sobering up fast. "So if I don't teach you you'll make my mission difficult?"

"I'll be on you like a bad smell, Ace."

"But what about you, Chick?" he said, smirking. "These rules we must play by?"

I knew I had him. Chick Chipperfield, boys and girls, has always been a dynamite closer. "That's my problem, Toby. Give me the secret and we go our separate ways."

Damned if it wasn't simple. We went back to the office and Toby took me through it—what you have to do with your voice and your hands and everything. Just your basic mystical flimflam; settle your subject down, then lay on the message. You kind of black out for a few seconds, but Toby said not to worry after he'd done it on me—that's when you implant your words of serenity and brotherhood.

It's the next day now and I'm dying to get to the lot and try it out, but I keep getting sidetracked.

See, all of a sudden I have these cravings, these uncontrollable urges, to stop at stores and buy certain things. The deluxe blender, fine. The old lady's already got one with umpteen speeds, but you never know when you'll need a backup unit. Same with the trash compactor and the angora walking sweater, even though we don't have a dog. But what the hell am I going to do with a live ostrich?



There was evidence to pin Kit to the scene of the crime . . .

VIOLET

by HAL
ELLSON



The dark red ceiling reflected light and absorbed shadows. Curtains of fainter red and the thinnest sticks of bamboo barely concealed the black night outside. This was the drama of the kitchen, formalized and silent but for the faint articulations of water dripping steadily from a leaky faucet.

A quartet of white wrought-iron chairs sat rigidly at a scrolled table topped by shiny glass whose center area was occupied by a silver platter

containing a cluster of wax grapes, a tangerine, and two peaches.

The chairs were unoccupied, the kitchen empty. Two rooms away, across the dining area and half across the vast living room on an enormous low couch, austere modern and sentinelled by two huge lamps, Charles rested with his face bashed against a ridiculously small black pillow. Exhausted, he lay in a stupor halfway between the black pit of sleep and consciousness.

Footsteps announced someone on the stairs. Softly they descended to the living room. He knew it was Kit. She moved on and entered the kitchen. Now there were three empty chairs. She sat on the fourth, lit a cigarette, and turned.

Charles was engaged in a terrible struggle. The poisons of fatigue still claimed his body, the footsteps he'd heard on the stairs echoed in his mind, calling him back to consciousness and life. The struggle went on. He sank into stupor, came to, saw the harsh blinding light, and gave up the struggle, only to revive again and finally lift himself from that deadly prone position, prop his back against the couch, and turn his head.

Across the green-carpeted living room, which darkened beyond the arch and in the unlit dining area, beyond these and a second smaller arch where the violent red of the kitchen absorbed the light, he saw Kit, face vacant, head turned. A universe away, she smiled, beckoned. Fatigue stunned him. He couldn't respond; she didn't seem real. His eyes closed.

When he opened them again the kitchen was empty and the light burned in a hollow room.

Rising, he brushed back his hair, rubbed his face, and looked toward the kitchen again. It was as vacant as his mind, serene in its absolute immaculateness. Had Kit really been there? He no longer knew.

But there might be evidence, a cigarette stub in an ashtray, telltale crumbs from a late snack. It was not quite midnight. He crossed the living room and dining room, following the bright green carpet from the area of light into shadow to the final arch opening into the kitchen, the dominion of red where, for a moment, he felt enveloped in fire.

No ashtray on the table. It was in its proper niche, placed with measured exactness on a sill between two motionless curtains, as clean and lustrous as it had been when it had come from the kiln.

There were no telltale crumbs, no evidence whatsoever to pin Kit to the scene. He expected none, for neatness with her was obsessional.

Water dripped in the sink, solo drops in an aggravating tattoo from a

shiny modern faucet which had defied the genius of three plumbers and their helpers. The plumbers had gone, the bills were long since paid, but the leak remained. It had started one hot evening back in summer. Now it measured the seconds of winter's eternity.

Charles glanced at the clock on the gas range. Five minutes of midnight, and five minutes too soon for the phone to ring. He knew it would as inevitably as the stars fixed in the stark black firmament of the winter's night.

The interval served as a reprieve. He could prepare for the call, the inane lispy voice, the blunt and pointed questions that would come with a persistent innocence which brooked no devious replies.

He hurried into the dining room to the oak cabinet where a variety of bottles were stored. Lack of time and the first flutterings of panic weakened his ability to discriminate. He seized the first bottle that met his hand and hurried into the kitchen.

A water glass served as holder for the scotch that poured from the bottle. He glanced at the clock, and heard the water dripping steadily in the sink. Four minutes to midnight.

Exactly on the hour, as he knew it would, the phone rang with nerve-shattering violence. He put down the empty glass, stepped into the dining room, and lifted the instrument.

"Hello? Is this you, Charles?" The voice was childish, as it had to be, and, as usual, she used his given name. He wanted to laugh in spite of his anger.

"Yes, it's me, Violet."

"Were you expecting me to call?"

"I suppose I was."

"Well, I didn't want to disappoint you. I never, never like to be disappointed myself, but I'm very tired. I went to a movie today, and saw both pictures twice. They were very scary pictures, and—"

"Yes, I suppose they were," Charles said, purposely interrupting.

"I will probably have a nightmare," Violet went on. "I don't like them, but—"

He gritted his teeth, and waited. What sounded like a yawn followed the pause, then Violet said, "I'm tired, Charles. Good night."

The conversation ended that abruptly, but Violet's voice seemed to hover in the unlighted room. For a moment Charles expected her to appear before him out of a shadowed corner. She didn't, of course, and

the sharp feeling of expectation faded. He needed another drink. One didn't suffice; he had another, and Kit called from above.

He washed the glass, put away the bottle, turned out the lights, and made his way to the stairs, groping upward into a coherent area of dim light. On the landing he pictured Kit in the bedroom and saw the vision duplicated exactly as he stepped past the bedroom threshold, a pink sweater over her shoulders, a pillow propped behind her, and wearing glasses which he disliked because they made her look older.

She saw the expression in his eyes and removed the eyeglasses quickly. The transformation was almost miraculous; the years fell away. He remembered "waking" on the couch, seeing her across the vast distance of those rooms below and through the double frame of arches sitting in the kitchen and smiling at him. She was smiling now in the same confusing manner. "What's wrong, Charles?" she finally said.

"Why didn't you wake me up?"

"You were sleeping?"

"On the couch. You must have seen me."

"But how? I wasn't downstairs."

"Weren't you in the kitchen?"

"I just told you I wasn't downstairs. You must have been dreaming."

He conceded this with a nod. Kit was still smiling. "The phone rang," she said. "I suppose it was Violet?"

"At this hour, who else would it be?"

"Ah, you're angry with her," Kit said.

"I've a good mind—"

"She means well. You've got to be patient."

"Means well? I'm sick of her. Frankly, she should be in a home of some sort."

"Imagine if she heard you say that," Kit said. "Why, you're her hero. She worships the ground you walk on."

"She's sickening. I wish you'd keep her out of the house. I wish you'd stop using her."

Kit arched her brows in an exquisite expression of surprise. "'Using her' is the wrong phrase. I find her helpful, but I pay her well."

"There are other children in the neighborhood."

"But none like Violet. I can depend on her."

"She really wormed her way around you, didn't she? You like her, and yet you know she doesn't like you in the least."

Kit smiled with amusement.

"Her dislike is reasonable. The child is jealous. After all, she sees me as a rival."

Charles shook his head. "You think that's amusing, but it's not," he snapped. "It's highly abnormal. Besides, she doesn't simply dislike you. I've seen it in her eyes. She hates you."

"Oh, really, Charles. That's too much."

"All right," he said with a gesture of surrender. "Don't listen to me."

She smiled at him, then reached for the light. "It's late," she said, and plunged the room into darkness. Like a drunk he groped his way to the bed.

Kit said, "No, Charles."

"What's wrong?"

"You know what's wrong."

"You're not going to start that again, are you?"

"It's you who started it, you know."

"God, I thought it was over. I've explained. Jean's my secretary. I had to take her to Chicago, but only for business."

"What kind of business?" Kit's tart voice cut him to the quick.

It was useless; he didn't reply. But why couldn't she understand and drop the matter? He began to protest again, then reached for her and she drew away.

Like I'm poison, he thought. God, why can't she be reasonable?

Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday passed without event; that is, Violet didn't call and ran no errands. On Thursday, at dinner, Kit was about to mention this when the doorbell rang.

Instinctively she knew who it was, and smiled when Charles said, "Who can that be?"

It was Violet, of course. Stubbornly she kept her pudgy finger on the button till he opened the door, then lifted her bland face and secretive eyes. A handsome, healthy child, but too heavy in a muscular way, she eyed him in an odd manner now.

It was an unusual hour; he hadn't expected her and was far from pleased. She sensed this, but refused to acknowledge it. "I have to see Kit," she said.

The cheek of her. A mere child referring to his wife in that fashion, but that was her way. He nodded, and Violet darted past him before he

could properly lead her. Closing the door, he trailed her into the living room to find her already plumped down at the table and apologizing for not appearing since Sunday.

"My mother wouldn't let me out," she explained.

"You were bad?" Kit asked with a darting glance for Charles as he sat down.

Violet shook her head. "It happened in school," she said.

"What did?"

"I wasn't really bad, but the teacher thought so."

Kit smiled and signaled to Charles to continue with his dinner. When he didn't, she said to Violet, "You told me the teacher liked you so much, and you said she was very nice."

"Miss Sparks stinks," Violet said blandly. "She's not really a nice person at all. I thought she was, but I changed my mind."

"Why?"

"Because she made me do what I didn't want to do, so I hate her now. Anyhow, I didn't really like her before. Her face is too big and—"

"Never judge anyone by his looks," said Kit.

"She's really ugly and—" A sly look transfixed the child's face as she stopped herself. Perhaps she realized Kit was a good friend of the teacher.

"And what?" said Kit.

"Nothing. You see, we're friends again."

"I'm glad to hear that."

"But it's not like before. We're only friends of a sort now. After all, my mother was very angry with me because Miss Sparks came to the house Monday after school and spoke to her."

"That doesn't sound like Miss Sparks. I'm sure she didn't want you punished."

"Oh, yes, she did, but I didn't care at all. It hurt her more than it did me."

"Hurt her?"

"The kick. I kicked her good in the shins," Violet replied with a triumphant smile. She was up from the chair then and moving toward the door when suddenly she turned and stared boldly at Charles. Next she turned to Kit. Hate glowed in her eyes now.

"Well?" said Kit with an amused smile.

"I'll be here at half past three tomorrow," Violet answered and started for the door.

When it closed after her, Charles leaned back in his chair. "I don't suppose you missed that display," he remarked.

"Hardly. She looked like she wanted to eat you up and poison me," Kit laughed.

"And you find that amusing?"

"I thought she was very cute. My little rival. And the story she told about Miss Sparks. What a vivid imagination that child has!"

"I believed every word of it," said Charles. "She's quite capable of kicking the shins of anyone she dislikes."

"Fantasy," Kit answered. "You should hear some of the things she tells me, and with a straight face. The wildest tales—"

"Look," Charles interrupted. "Keep her out of here. Something's wrong with her."

"Ah, admiration unsettles you."

"I'm serious."

"Don't be frightened. She'll get over it soon enough."

There was no point in continuing. Charles lowered his head, glared at the plate before him, and the food which minutes ago had looked so appetizing all but turned his stomach.

Three days before Christmas the phone rang. It was midnight. Charles knew who the caller was and refused to answer, but Kit called from upstairs, "It's your girl friend, dear. Better speak to her or she'll ring all night."

He picked up the phone.

"Hello, Charles."

The sticky-sweet voice was too much for him.

"Look, Violet," he said. "It's late. You shouldn't be calling at such an hour."

"Late? But Kit told me you stay up almost all night."

"If I do, it's because I'm an adult. You're not. You should be in bed."

"Oh, I was," Violet tittered. "But I sneaked downstairs to the phone. My mother and father don't know a thing about it."

"Then they should. At any rate, you've got to stop calling here, and that's final."

"But this is very, very important."

"Important?"

"Yes. I wanted to wish you a Merry Christmas."

Charles was taken back. He couldn't be harsh now, but it wasn't Christmas. He mentioned this, and Violet said, "Oh, I know, but I wanted to be sure to wish you a Merry Christmas. You see, Christmas Eve and Christmas night everybody stays up late at my house and maybe I couldn't use the phone, so I'm wishing you a Merry Christmas now."

"Merry Christmas," said Charles.

"And now may I speak to Kit?"

Charles wanted to laugh. "Why do you want to speak to her?" he asked.

"To wish her a Merry Christmas."

"All right, hold on." He covered the mouthpiece and called up to Kit, "Better come down here, dear. You're about to get yours at last. Violet wants to speak to you."

"Tell her I'm in bed. I'll speak to her tomorrow."

"You can't do that. She wants to wish you a Merry Christmas."

"But—"

"Come down and take your medicine."

Presently Kit appeared in nightgown and robe. With a malicious grin, Charles handed her the phone. "It's all yours." Kit took it with a rueful grin.

"I want to wish you a Merry Christmas," said Violet.

"Thank you. You're very—"

Violet's voice stopped her. "I want to ask you a question, if you don't mind. It's very important and it's about you and Charles, but mostly you."

"An important question? Well, ask and I'll try to answer you."

There was a pause. Kit could feel the child hesitating at the other end of the line. Then the question came like a shot, "Why haven't you any children?"

"Oh, just because I haven't," Kit replied.

"Don't you like them?"

"Oh, but I do."

"If you do and you didn't have any, then you shouldn't have got married."

"I'll tell you why I got married," said Kit. "Because I was in love with Charles."

"Oh, no you weren't. You couldn't have been." This was spoken with such vehemence that Kit smiled to herself. "But I was," she protested. "Now may I say something more to the point?"

"What?"

"My husband doesn't want you to phone any more."

"That's a lie!"

"I'm sorry, Violet, but it's the truth. What's more, he doesn't want you to come here when he's at home."

There was an interval of silence, as if the message had stunned Violet; then her answer came. "That's another lie!" she screamed, and banged down the phone.

Charles smiled as Kit turned to him. "I didn't expect that of you," he said. "Was she angry?"

"Angry is hardly the word," Kit answered dryly.

The next day Violet didn't come to the house or call on the phone. A week passed without a sign of her. Charles was thankful. At last they were rid of her, he thought. But he was wrong.

At three-thirty the following day, during a heavy rain, the bell rang. Kit was alone. She went to the door and opened it. There was Violet, drops of rain trickling down her wooden face.

"Well, look who's here," said Kit. "I didn't expect to see you."

"But I always go to the stores for you. That's why I'm here," said Violet.

There were errands to be run, but Kit looked out at the rain falling relentlessly. "We'll wait till it lets up," she said.

Violet stepped into the house. Her manner was cold and formal. She's angry, Kit thought, smiling to herself.

In the hall, Violet took off her raincoat, but not her rubbers. "I'll keep them on if you don't mind," she said, and entered the living room.

Kit went off to the kitchen. Soon she returned with a plateful of crackers and presented them to Violet. "I know you like these," she said.

The child eyed them coldly and turned up her nose. "No, thank you."

"Then perhaps you'd like to watch television?"

"No, thank you."

Kit smiled, left the plate, and returned to the kitchen. Just as she reached it, the television set went on at full volume.

"A little lower!" she called out, but the din continued. She went back to the living room. Violet sat motionless on the floor, her face barely a foot from the screen.

"Will you please—"

Slowly Violet's head swiveled, her chin tilted, and a look of pure hatred

shone in her eyes. "I heard you. I don't happen to be deaf, so you don't have to shout," she snapped, and calmly turned back to the set.

"Violet!"

"You're disturbing me. I want to watch this program." Violet spoke without turning, but she lowered the volume ever so slightly.

Kit returned to the kitchen. The racket from the living room continued. Outside, cold winter rain slashed the streets.

The cold roast was cut and lay on a platter, with the long carving knife beside it. Kit could hear the television set still blasting from the living room. Violet's still angry, she thought, pouring a glass of milk and placing it on the table.

She turned and went into the living room. Violet ignored her. "It's getting late," she said. "Don't you think you'd better leave?"

Slowly Violet's head pivoted; her eyes smoldered as she fixed them on Kit. "You don't want me here," she said.

"It's not that, but my husband will be home soon, and you know he doesn't want to find you here."

Violet's lips set into a thin line. The hatred in her eyes faded into despair. "I thought you wanted me to go to the stores," she said.

"It's raining too hard. You can take care of that tomorrow."

Violet nodded, as if this ended the matter. She started to rise and sat back. "I'd like to see the end of this program," she said.

It was a delaying tactic, and not very subtle. She wanted to see Charles. Kit smiled to herself, shrugged, went to the closet below the stairs, and got her raincoat.

Violet's eyes followed her. "Where are you going?" she asked.

"Next door to Mrs. Peterson's for a while. When you leave, will you please turn off the television?"

Violet glared at her suspiciously, nodded, and watched her to the door. Kit paused there, with her hand on the knob, and looked back. "If you like, there's a glass of milk in the kitchen," she said.

Violet glared back at her. When the door closed after Kit, she got up and hurried to the kitchen. The glass of milk was on the table. She stared at it as if it were poison, then picked it up and deliberately poured it into the sink.

Charles arrived home at five. Darkness had fallen. As he came up the walk, he saw the green glare of the television set in the windows. When

he entered the living room, he found it empty. The whole house felt empty, and a queer feeling beset him. Red-tinted light glowed in the kitchen, but no sound came from there. Frowning, he started toward it.

At twenty past five Kit opened the door. The television was still on, and Violet squatted before it with her face a foot from the screen. Midway across the room Kit stopped and waited for Violet to turn, but the child sat motionless, entranced.

"Violet."

"Yes?"

"Did my husband come home yet?"

"He's in the kitchen," Violet replied without taking her eyes from the set.

Kit started for the kitchen, saw it through two rooms and two archways, the wrought-iron table bearing its waxen fruit, the four white chairs. She passed through the first archway, the second, and stopped; the startling hue of the kitchen leaped at her—red ceiling, floor, windowsills, and curtains. The fiery color distorted her vision, impaled her senses.

Then she saw him. Charles lay on the floor beyond the glass-topped table, his arms flung wide and mouth agape, silently protesting the violence that had overtaken him. His eyes, wide open, were fixed on the ceiling. Beside him on the floor lay the implement of death, the carving knife Kit had left on the table.

In the living room, with her face to the television screen, sat the killer.

Her voice betrayed nothing; her face was like stone. "You found your husband?" Violet said, turning as Kit entered the living room.

Kit nodded and said, "You know I'll have to call the police."

"I don't care who you call," answered Violet in the same steady voice. Then, still sitting on the floor, she turned back to the television set.

Kit started toward the phone, smiling to herself. It had been so simple. At last she was rid of Charles, and that awful brat.

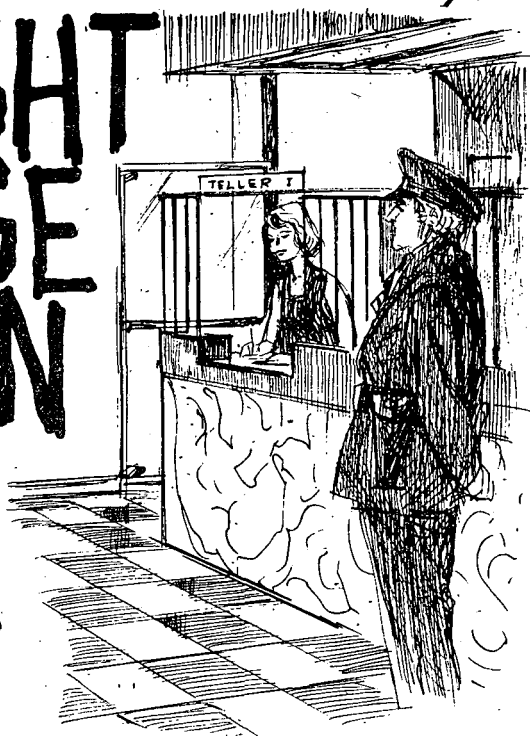
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Leo and Frankie were con men, not bank robbers . . .

A SLIGHT CHANGE OF PLAN

by

CARROLL
MAYERS



Leo was first to suggest we shift our base of operation. The local gendarmes appeared to be getting unduly inquisitive about our endeavors.

"Good idea," I agreed. "How about Vegas?"

He shook his head. "Let's really cool it for a while. I've got an uncle downstate I haven't seen for three years. He's retired, and should be glad to put us up for a spell."

"Sounds good," I said. "What's the name of the town?"

"Conners Corners."

"Great. Can I find it on the map without my glasses?"

Leo smiled. "It's no metropolis, but a change in tempo won't hurt us."

I couldn't fault him there. Since teaming up six months ago, we'd done pretty well. But collecting magazine subscriptions ("I'm an advance representative with a special offer for this area, ma'am.") without benefit of actual publisher does have its potential hazards and, as I've mentioned, we'd become aware of official speculation.

I asked Leo, "Does your uncle—or aunt—approve of your financial activities?"

His smile held. "Uncle George is a widower, Frankie. Aunt Laura died four years ago. And, no, he's not too enthusiastic. He calls me an opportunist, and lets it go at that."

"Good for Uncle George," I said. "Then Conners Corners it is."

We'd acquired a semi-respectable jalopy for our solicitations, so there was nothing to delay us. We drove downstate the following morning, completing the trip before dark.

The briefest survey confirmed Leo's category: a metropolis the town wasn't. A movie house, a bank, a post office, and a clutch of small shops made up the "business section." Add a half dozen lazy tree-lined streets and a fertilizer plant on the southern outskirts and you had it.

Still, overall it was a pleasant little community, and Uncle George was as amenable to our visit as Leo had intimated. A lean, wiry gaffer, patently fit despite his threescore-odd years and a thatch of unruly grey hair, his welcome was instant and, but for an initial casual query, unqualified.

"Glad to have you and your friend stay as long as you like, Leo. No special to-do, is there?"

"None at all," Leo assured him. "Frankie and I just thought we'd drop out of the rat race for a week or so."

"Fine. Nice to have your company." The old gentleman was preparing a quick supper of cold cuts, salad, and tea. "Although until the end of the month I'll be working from nine until two-thirty. Until five on Fridays."

"Working, Uncle George?" Leo asked.

"At the bank, as a guard," Uncle George said. "The way the economy is these days I can't make out with only my pension." He made a vague gesture. "So when the guard job came up, I grabbed it."

"I'm sure it helps," Leo agreed. "But why only until the end of the month?"

Settling himself at the table, Uncle George showed sudden disinterest in the meal. "Mr. Barnes is replacing me then," he said.

"Who's Barnes?"

"He's the bank manager. He says I'm too old."

Leo snorted. "That's ridiculous! Anybody can see you're as fit as a man of fifty—" He broke off, scowling. "Why'd he hire you if he thinks you can't handle the job?"

Uncle George said, "He didn't. The assistant manager took me on in Barnes's absence. Anyway, my age is just an excuse. Mr. Barnes has never liked me."

"Why not, for Pete's sake?"

"Call it a personality clash."

"That's also ridiculous. I think I'll have a talk with this Barnes."

"It wouldn't do any good," Uncle George said. "I've tried to reason with the man. His mind's made up."

Leo shot me a tight look. "Have you ever heard anything so asinine?"

I shook my head. And then, because Leo's look clearly suggested as much, I said, "Maybe there's something we can do."

"There certainly is," Leo said.

Uncle George became upset. "Now wait a minute, Leo," he protested. "I've never said too much about your lifestyle. That's your business. But I wouldn't want you or your friend to do anything that might get you into trouble. I can handle this problem myself."

Leo reached out and squeezed the old gentleman's fingers. "Don't worry, Uncle George." He built a confident grin. "Now—let's eat, eh?"

Later, though, after his uncle went to bed, Leo's confidence was a bit strained. He swore softly. "I'll think of something. Uncle's going to hold onto that job."

The next morning, nothing was said about the problem as the three of us puttered about, making constrained small talk until Uncle George left for the bank. After he left, Leo told me he was going for a walk. When I offered to accompany him, he put me off, saying he'd be gone only a short time, mainly to pick up a carton of cigarettes.

I had a hunch his absence would be considerably extended—sufficient to stimulate his creative juices and ponder some definite action.

He was gone all day and didn't return until suppertime. When, finally, he began to expound, he told his uncle and me he'd spent the day in the park, smoking and thinking—and that he'd come up with an idea.

"It's simple," he said smoothly. "Frankie and I will hold up the bank." I said, "You can't be serious!"

Uncle George blurted, "What are you saying, Leo?"

"I know, Frankie," Leo told me. "We're con artists, not heisters. But I think we can pull this off." Turning to his uncle, he asked, "Suppose a gunman did try to hold up the bank and you thwarted the attempt? Wouldn't that boost your stock so high that Barnes would have no logical excuse to have you replaced?"

Uncle George said, "I suppose so." He regarded Leo uncertainly. "You mean it would be a phony holdup? You and Frankie?"

"Exactly," Leo said. "I flash a gun around, scare everybody on the scene—including you, momentarily—and demand that one of the tellers fill a bag with cash. It looks like I'm going to pull it off and then suddenly you disregard my gun and tackle me. There's a struggle, I lose the gun, panic, break loose, and flee without the money. Frankie's outside in the car with the motor running and we manage to get clear. But the money's safe—and you're a hero!"

I said, "The gun could go off accidentally in all that scuffling."

"Not a toy gun," Leo said. "No one will know it's not real in all the excitement. And afterward it won't matter when it's found to be a fake. Actual heists have been made that way."

"What about your uncle's revolver?"

"He simply has it unloaded that day, and nobody's the wiser."

That did appear to remove the danger, but Uncle George wasn't buying the script from the outset.

"I appreciate your trying to help me, Leo," he said slowly, "but I'm afraid I couldn't be a party to anything like that."

"But it's only a *scam*," Leo said. "Nobody gets hurt. The bank doesn't lose a penny. And you'll hold onto your job."

The old gentleman rubbed his chin. "It's still dishonest somehow." He looked at me. "What do you think, Frankie?"

I didn't exactly favor being in the middle, but Leo's caper did sound both possible and plausible to me. Also, I was as irked as Leo over Barnes' treatment of his uncle. "Like Leo says, it could assure your staying on, sir," I said.

Uncle George remained dubious. But Leo continued to pressure him, until finally he capitulated to a degree.

"I'm not saying yes," he said, "but I'll sleep on it."

I don't know if Uncle George slept well or poorly. Whatever, by breakfast he appeared to have resolved any doubts. "All right, Leo," he said simply. "I'll leave everything in your hands."

Leo was pleased. "We'll stage it in a day or so," he said. "First, though, Frankie and I want to check out the scene."

Our survey was easy. Leo and I each sauntered into the bank and broke twenty-dollar bills, ignoring Uncle George and using the brief time we were there to familiarize ourselves with the overall layout. We learned that the bank followed the essential simplicity of the town itself: one guard, no observation cameras or elaborate alarm system.

Leo was especially high at supper that night. "Any reason we can't go ahead with it tomorrow?" he asked me.

"None that I can see," I said.

"So tomorrow it is. Uncle George, when I turn away from the teller with the money and you charge into me, don't be afraid to make it rough. I'll manage to fight you off, panic, and break free."

"I understand," the old gentleman said.

So we were all set.

Until the following morning—when I dropped and broke my glasses on the bathroom tile.

"Can you drive without them, Frankie?" Leo asked anxiously.

"No way," I said. "I can walk around O.K., but driving is out."

"Damn! In this town it'll probably take a week to get new lenses—" He broke off, snapping his fingers. "But we can still go ahead today. We'll just switch the routine around: I'll drive and *you* stage the heist."

I blinked. "Now just a second—"

Leo wasn't listening. "You'll be as convincing as I would."

"But—"

"Just follow through the way we set it up." He turned to his uncle. "There's no reason to put it off, is there, if Frankie and I change places?"

Uncle George considered, and finally said, "I guess not."

Leo spread his hands at me. "Well, then?"

I sighed. "O.K. I'm the heister. . . ."

Before Uncle George left for the bank he unloaded his service revolver, backed his car from the garage at the rear of his modest plot, and parked it on the street. We left the garage door open. We'd decided that once Leo and I barreled away from the bank, rather than essaying any tricky zipping around secondary roads to clear the town, we'd simply drive back to his uncle's, garage our jalopy, and be home free. Let the authorities scour the state for us.

Uncle George understood that I'd make my appearance inside the bank at ten o'clock on the dot. He'd deliberately pay me little attention until I'd swung away from the teller with the money bag. Then he'd erupt into action.

At a couple of minutes before ten, Leo tooled our heap into the bank's parking area, selecting a slot where he couldn't be blocked from the exit. Handing over the compact canvas satchel and the toy revolver he'd picked up, he gave me an easy smile. "Relax, fellow. You'll do fine."

"I am relaxed," I said, tucking the gun up my jacket sleeve. "Just keep that motor perking."

In point of fact, now that we were down to the wire I did feel pretty cool. The scenario wasn't all that complicated. If Uncle George didn't foul up—and there was no reason to suspect he would—we should be able to carry it off.

I got my first jolt within seconds after I walked into the bank. Admittedly, my vision was now impaired; even so, I should have been able to spot Uncle George. But I couldn't. I sauntered to one of the writing tables, looking around everywhere.

He wasn't anywhere in sight.

Finally I decided he was deliberately keeping out of sight until the moment of truth. So I casually moved to the teller nearest the door, passed the satchel across, and said quietly, "Fill this with all the large bills you've got. If you scream or give any sign, you're dead." I let the gun slip into my fingers.

The teller was a busty blonde with green fingernails. Her hazel eyes went wide and her breath caught, but she took the satchel and began stuffing it with currency.

I kept my eyes on her every move, at the same time frantically straining the periphery of my vision.

Where was Uncle George? Seconds were ticking away, and still he hadn't shown.

I was sweating now, my lips dry. Abruptly, the teller shoved back the satchel. I clutched it in my free hand, practically a reflex action. My heart was thudding; I couldn't keep stalling. I turned from the counter, desperately scanning the lobby. No Uncle George.

There was a sudden yell from some other employee as my turning disclosed the gun. For one numbing pulsebeat I froze. Then, totally unaware I was carrying both the gun and the money satchel, I pelted across and out of the lobby into the parking lot.

Leo had the passenger door open. I clambered in and he gunned the motor and took off. But even before the rubber died, he'd glimpsed what I still held and yipped, "What the hell—?"

"Just drive!" I retorted. "He wasn't there! Your uncle wasn't there!"

Our preliminary strategy paid off. We were home and our jalopy was safely under cover within ten minutes, while—as we learned later from a local newscast—the State Police scoured the area for the perpetrators of the daring holdup.

Uncle George set the whole mad brouhaha to rights upon his return from the bank. He was doubly upset. First, because he'd failed in his own role, and then because I'd actually taken the money.

"I had no choice," he lamented. "Mr. Barnes called me into his office just before ten and spent five minutes telling me this week would be my last rather than the end of the month. The state bank examiners are due the first of the week and he feels I'd create an unfavorable impression."

Leo swore. "Examiners aren't concerned with a bank's security."

Uncle George said, "I told you, Mr. Barnes just wants to get rid of me."

I glanced at Leo. Our initial bewilderment and concern with getting clear had quickly changed to heady euphoria once we'd checked the satchel and found we'd acquired \$26,000.

"You can forget Mr. Barnes now, sir," I said.

Leo picked up my inference. "That's right, Uncle George. We got twenty-six grand in here. Half of that should more than make up for losing that crummy guard job." He returned my look. "More, if you say so—all right, Frankie?"

"Sure thing."

Uncle George shook his head. "I said before, Leo—your lifestyle is your own concern. But I feel that stolen money isn't for me."

Sure, Leo and I argued with him, as we had the first night. We couldn't

persuade him completely, but after a couple of hours he finally agreed to accept \$5,000. The next day we took off for Vegas.

And that was the end of the affair—until the first of the following week. We'd gotten a kick out of following the aftermath of our caper on the newscasts and in the *Connors Corners Citizen*. The latter was where Leo spotted the item. BANK MANAGER SUSPENDED was the heading, and the text read:

Following an anonymous telephone call, federal and local authorities are looking into the activities of Roger Barnes, manager of the Citizens Trust. The anonymous caller suggested Barnes's desk be checked as a possible depository for misused funds. Investigation by state examiners currently at the bank disclosed \$5,000 in cash. Barnes disclaims all knowledge of the money, but has been relieved of his duties pending further developments.

I grinned at Leo. "Looks like your uncle dreamed up a ploy of his own. With Barnes under a cloud, his job's probably out of danger."

Leo concurred. "Now I see why he let us persuade him."

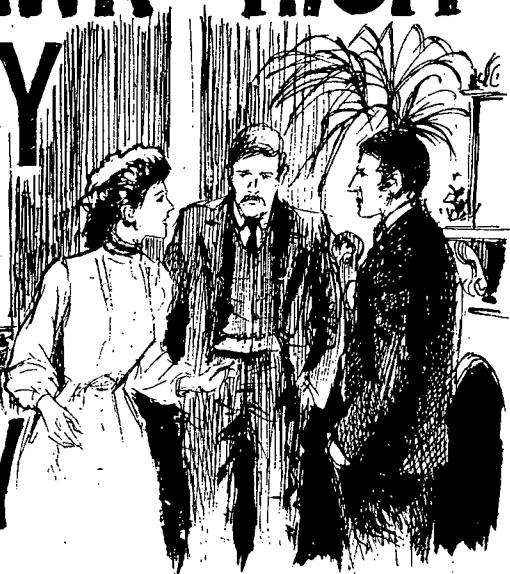
We had a ball in Vegas.



Who would want to poison a monkey? . . .

THE HAWK AND HIGH SOCIETY

S. S.
RAFFERTY



Captain John Fenley of the Metropolitan Police was doubly happy as he sat sipping port in the gas-lit office-sitting room of Dr. Amos Phipps. Here he had not only guilefully escaped attending his wife's weekly Chautauqua study group meeting, now in session at his home, but, more's the pleasure, Phipps was going to make one of his delicious bachelor braiser dinners. Of course, Tess Fenley would never believe her trencherman of a husband would enjoy the delicate morsels that came out of

Phipps's chafing dish. ("Land sakes, my John? Curried shrimp and cream? He'd have a fit!") Fenley heaved a contented sigh and leaned back in the easy chair.

"We call that momentary delusion," Phipps said from the wing chair opposite. "Harmless in your case, however."

"That's the trouble with having an alienist as a friend," Fenley said good-naturedly. "You brain doctors are always probing for motives."

"*Touché*, my friend, but so are police detectives. We are well matched."

The doctor's offhand retort would not be taken casually by any of the twenty-odd criminals who had been put behind bars—and a few on the scaffold—since Phipps and Fenley had formed a working relationship several years back. Ironically, the two men were as dissimilar in background and temperament as any pair on earth. Fenley, a burly no-nonsense pragmatist, had a flair for the gallant, as evidenced by his cool heroism at Bull Run; Phipps, a tall wiry aesthete, was given to theoretical postulation. Phipps was now a consultant to the police force, and Fenley had an official excuse for avoiding his wife's flights into culture.

"Let's hope it's not too momentary," Fenley said, refilling his glass. "What's on for tonight? Lobster?"

"Oysters in madeira. I had them in Paris several—"

There was a knock at the door. Phipps sprang agilely to his feet. "From the authority of that rap, I'd say your delusion is doomed to be momentary."

"It can't be the department. No one knows I'm here."

Phipps had a wry smile on his face as he admitted a young uniformed patrolman into the room. The bicycle clip on the officer's right trouser leg and the envelope in his hand told them he had a message from headquarters. "Evening, Captain," he said with a salute as he handed over the envelope.

Fenley read the contents and said gruffly, "Is this some kind of joke, lad?"

"No, sir," the young man said uneasily. "The Chief Inspector gave it to me personal, sir. 'Supernumerary O'Fallion,' he says, 'you track down Fenley—er, Captain Fenley—and tell him it's urgent.' Will you sign the receipt book, sir?"

After he had signed and O'Fallion had saluted and turned to leave, Fenley asked, "Just how *did* you 'track me down'?"

"Oh, yer missus told me, sir. 'Well,' she said, 'he's supposed to be at the target range, but you'll find him eating out of flaming pans up at Copley Mews on Thirteenth Street.' Flaming pans!" he chuckled. "Got some sense of humor, your missus has. Say, Captain, you're missing a swell party at your house. People reading poetry and all."

"Yes," Fenley said. "That's all, lad."

The messenger came to rigid attention and delivered another salute that could only have been outdone in comic opera.

"The wages of deceit." Phipps guffawed when the messenger had left. "No, I suppose it's more correctly *intended* deceit. Your wife, like most women, is quite a detective in her own right. Must you go?"

"I've seen some dillies in my time, but this beats 'em all." He read the note aloud. " 'Investigate complaint of Mrs. Staunton Chapman, Number Six Washington Square, pertaining to the unlawful harboring of an ape in the neighborhood.' Since the Chief Inspector has the sense of humor of a lemon tester, this has to be on the up-and-up."

"*The Mrs. Staunton Chapman?* I shouldn't think the Chief Inspector would dare refuse her any service."

"She's some society muckety-muck, isn't she?"

"She's the queen muckety-muck, my friend."

"I guess you're right. Her late husband had banks full of money. But I can't see wasting the department's time over a monkey."

"Obviously, she thinks it important. Come now, Fenley, it might be interesting—and, I might add, you have no choice."

When they entered the double-fronted townhouse on the south side of Washington Square, Fenley's suspicion that Phipps had come along merely to get a look at the fabled mansion was confirmed by the doctor's roving eyes. They were admitted by a footman who had them wait in a panelled chamber which boasted red and blue plush chairs, a grand piano draped with a Spanish shawl, and the obligatory array of family photographs by Brady of Broadway. Fenley sat uneasily on one of the small chairs while Phipps snooped about the room.

"For God's sake, don't break anything," Fenley cautioned. "Everything in here looks like a priceless doodad."

"This Ming vase is," Phipps said, examining the piece. "You really amaze me, Fenley. All the way down here in the hack you never once mentioned the possibility that an ape is loose in the neighborhood."

Fenley used his hand as a screen for his lowered voice. "When you've been on the force as long as I have, you learn that old ladies have a way of exaggerating, Doctor. She probably saw a drunk in a fur coat staggering through the park and took him for an ape. We'll just listen to her and act interested, then go back about our business."

Fenley's optimistic prognosis lost a bit of its luster when the two men were ushered into an upstairs sitting room. Mrs. Staunton Chapman, a thin, bird-like woman in her late sixties, sat regally in a Louis XIV chair looking very much a no-nonsense individual.

"I said *apelike creature*, Captain, not ape. I believe it is a large monkey, but I am not an expert in natural science."

Phipps studied her intently, fascinated. He was trying to sum her up, to capture her in a few words as an artist does with a quick charcoal sketch.

Her nails were long and terribly out of fashion and either buffed or clear-lacquered to a high gloss. Flanking her chair, two Pekingese dogs sat quietly in baskets. As he observed the way she clutched the arms of the chair, he was reminded of—what? Of course—the Ming vase, the lion-faced temple dogs at her feet, the long, elegant, useless nails. A Chinese empress in a New York townhouse.

"ASPCA!" she said in response to a suggestion by Fenley that that was the proper public agency to handle the matter. "My dear Captain, since I practically support that organization I need no tutelage on its function! A house on this Square is illegally harboring a wild animal. This is a *police* matter!"

"We'll dig right into it, ma'am," Fenley said with uncharacteristic meekness. "Do you have any notion as to which house—"

"Pull the bell cord," she ordered. While they waited, she took three chocolates from a box on the end table and fed each dog and herself a piece.

A butler entered and bowed with rigid formality. "Madam rang."

"Give these gentlemen the address, Parker, and show them out. I expect action, Captain," she said.

"Number Eighteen is on the other side of the Square," Fenley said as they cut across the park. "Damned old busybody."

"And yet she hardly fits the mold of a neighborhood crank."

"She's an animal lover, I guess."

"I wonder," Phipps said.

"Wonder what?"

"Animal lover connotes affection, a softness in her makeup—and yet the idea is incongruous in her case."

"She's a hard one, all right. Got the Commissioner jumping through hoops. And me."

"That might explain it—an exercise in power. Yes, that makes more sense. Fenley, I believe we are mixed up in a vendetta." They stopped before Number Eighteen and looked at the name on the stone hitching post.

"Straber," Phipps read aloud. "Now, what have they done to bring down the Empress's wrath?"

The young maid who answered the door was in a state of excitement as they entered, and Fenley's announcement that he was from the police only served to startle the girl all the more.

"For God's sake," a handsome matron said, sweeping into the parlor, "what are you waiting for, Bridie? Go fetch the doctor! Oh," she cried, as she saw the two men, "is there something I can do for you?"

She was no more than thirty, and her figure was ripe under her elegant dinner gown. Her voice had a definite twang to it. A midwesterner, Phipps thought.

"It seems we can help *you*, ma'am," Phipps said, stepping forward. "I am a doctor."

A look of bewilderment crossed the woman's face.

"But who sent for—? Oh, never mind. Please step into the dining room, Doctor—"

"Phipps, Mrs. Straber."

As they followed her down the center hall, she said quite matter-of-factly over her shoulder, "Not that you'll do much good, Doctor. I think she's dead."

If her statement jolted Fenley a bit, it was nothing compared to what awaited him in the dining room.

A dozen or so men and women in evening clothes stood around a sumptuous table with horrified looks on their faces. At the head of the table was the slumped body of a monkey, grotesquely dressed in a satin gown. On its head a tiara perched askew.

Phipps felt for a pulse at the wrist and then at the throat. Finding

none, he took up a highly polished silver plate and held it to the animal's mouth and nostrils. "I'm afraid it is dead," he said.

"Heart attack, no doubt," a Latin-looking gentleman said. "Very flighty animals, these monkeys."

"Do you always have your pet take meals with you, Mrs. Straber?" Fenley inquired.

"Are *you* a doctor too?"

"No, ma'am, I'm a captain of police. Fenley's the name."

"Police! I'm afraid I don't understand." Suddenly she remembered her guests. "Why don't you go into the library, folks. Gustave—" she motioned to the Latin gentleman—"will you pour everyone some champagne, please? Bridie seems to have disappeared. I'm sorry about this, folks. We'll all go to Rector's once I'm finished with these gentlemen. If you'll come with me, Captain."

She led Fenley and Phipps through a side door into a room no bigger than an alcove and offered them chairs. "I don't suppose you drink on duty," she said, pouring herself a glass of brandy from a decanter, "but I need this." She took an unladylike gulp and arranged herself on a loveseat.

"Poor little Regina just keeled over like a wet towel. I had no idea she was so sickly. Now—what brings the police to my door?"

"The truth of it is, ma'am, we're here because of the monkey," Fenley replied. "It's against the law to keep a wild animal uncaged."

"Oh, I see," she said, with a knowing look. "I don't have to ask who sent you. But it serves me right for trying to pull off this stunt. How in blazes did she get wind of it, I wonder?" She noticed Fenley's uneasiness. "Oh, come now, Captain, I've only been in town for a few months, but I know that only *she* could get a high-ranking police officer to harass me." Out of the corner of her eye she caught a glimpse of a young man in an opera cape passing the open door.

"Are you *leaving*?" she asked him with some irritation.

He stepped into the room. "I've got to run, Lettie."

"Why, for Pete's sake?" She turned to Fenley and Phipps. "This is—"

"D'Arcy, Jack D'Arcy," the young man said, nodding his head. "I've got to catch the nine o'clock train to New Haven."

"But you—oh, all right." She was trying to hide her irritation, but doing it badly. "Good evening, Jack."

"I'm sorry, Lettie. Good night, gentlemen."

She shrugged her shoulders and said, "College boys! Well, gentlemen, I'm sorry you can't haul me out of here in chains for keeping a monkey, but nature has intervened. And I can assure you I won't do it again. Now, tell me what I should do with the body."

"The ASPCA can take care of that," Phipps said.

"A bit salty, isn't she?" Fenley said as they reached the street. "These western women are a mite too masculine for my lights. What are you stopping for, Phipps?"

The doctor had stopped under the light from a streetlamp to read a piece of paper. "My dear Captain, you appear to have a mystery on your hands."

"How so?"

"That monkey didn't die of a heart attack, of that I'm sure. I have some experience with monkeys in research, and that one was no more than three years old. Best make sure the coroner sees the corpse. I suspect it was poisoned."

"Poisoned! Who would want to poison a monkey?"

"I don't know, but this thickens it." He handed the policeman the paper—an engraved invitation. It began:

Mrs. Lettie Straber
requests the honour of your presence
Tuesday, the 9th, at 8 P.M.
at a dinner honoring
Mrs. Staunton Chapman

"So that's what she meant by a 'stunt,' eh? Poking fun at the old lady by having a monkey stand in for her. But wait a minute, Phipps. Are you suggesting I investigate the murder of a monkey? I'd be the laughing stock of the force."

"Suit yourself. By the way, the young college man—"

"D'Arcy? What about him?"

"Well, his name *might* be D'Arcy, but I doubt it. His picture is prominently displayed on Mrs. Chapman's piano."

"That's his affair. Mine is investigating people crimes, not monkey business."

Phipps laughed. "What starts as shenanigans can often go awry."

"Here's a hackney. Come on, Doctor, you can put your skills to work on those oysters."

The oysters were delicious but, two days later, Fenley was not enjoying what he termed a monkey stew.

"It's a monkey stew, I tell you, Phipps," he said heatedly as he hustled into the doctor's rooms. "Come on, man, we've got work to do."

"The monkey was poisoned, then?"

Fenley's eyes rolled heavenward. "Blast the monkey! Mrs. Chapman is dead. I'll tell you about it in the cab." The doctor grabbed his hat and accompanied his friend.

"Butler found her dead sitting in the chair where we met her the other day," Fenley said as the hansom swayed and jolted down Fifth Avenue. "He thought she had a heart attack at first, but it looks like poisoning."

"How so?"

"Because her dogs are dead too. Remember how she fed those two pekes chocolates? Well, dollars to doughnuts, there's coniine in the candy. That's what killed the monkey too, by the way. Coniine. Thanks to you, I had the chimp autopsied, but somehow I wish the devil I hadn't."

"Why?"

"Because it confuses the issue. Now I have to investigate two murders and one of the victims is a blasted monkey."

"And the other is a very prominent member of New York society. Of course, the cases might not be connected."

"If there's coniine in those candies, it's unavoidable. I'm not even sure what coniine is."

"A derivative of the spotted hemlock," Phipps explained. "I don't even think it's in the pharmacopœia any more. It's an old fashioned treatment for whooping cough, and not easy to obtain."

"Well, that's some help. Maybe we can trace the source."

"Possibly. But you have a stronger lead, my friend."

"Yes, I know. Jack D'Arcy. There was something peculiar about that young fellow's eyes. Are you sure that was *his* picture in Mrs. Chapman's music room?"

"Yes, unless he has a twin."

"D'Arcy?" the young woman said, coming across the room to the piano where Fenley stood holding the picture in a silver frame. "There must

be some mistake, Captain. That's my cousin's nephew, Shelby Chapman. He's a senior at Yale. We wired him in New Haven last night; he should be here soon."

"I see." Fenley put the picture back on the piano. "Looks like a fella I met once name of D'Arcy."

Phipps observed the young woman intently. When the footman admitted them to the house a few minutes earlier, she had made an immediate appearance from someplace upstairs and complained about the police guards posted at the front entry. Announcing herself as Esther Lathrom, cousin to the late Mrs. Chapman, she was very much in command of the house and the situation. Phipps's scrutiny was initially focused on Miss Lathrom's physical appearance. She bore none of the handsomeness of the dead woman or her nephew. Aged twenty-four or so, tall, gaunt, and decidedly bony, she reminded him of an underfed horse.

"I realize that suicide is a crime in a way, but it's most embarrassing to have policemen about the house. Aunt Cissy wouldn't have wanted it."

"You're convinced that your 'aunt,' as you call her, committed suicide?" Phipps inquired.

"She was like an aunt to me, Doctor. Yes, I believe suicide, as shameful as it may be, is the only conclusion. Of course, it might have been an accident—but then there are the dogs."

"And through what medium do you think she took her life?" Phipps asked.

"Coniine, sir."

Phipps shot a furtive glance at Fenley. "What prompts that conclusion, Miss Lathrom?"

"Because it's right here in this house. I should tell you gentlemen that I am a professional nurse. My Aunt Cissy was a wealthy woman, but I work for a living and I'm proud of the fact. Cissy suffered from a touch of asthma, and her physician, Doctor Rogers, prescribed two drops of coniine in a glass of water at bedtime. Rogers is an old-fashioned fool. Coniine has been *passé* for several years. And because of her asthma he should have talked her out of having long-haired dogs around her."

"I take it you don't live here, Miss Lathrom."

"No, Captain, I live at the Bellevue nurses' residence, but I dropped in to see her occasionally. With Shelby away at college, there were just the servants around."

Phipps looked puzzled. "Are you implying she was lonely? As a leader of New York society, I should think she had a multitude of friends."

"Why is it the newspapers are always ten years behind the times?" she sighed. "Maybe it's because the society notes are written by lower-class females who are ignorant of the inner workings of the supposed elite society. The truth of the matter, gentlemen, is that Aunt Cissy had been passed by. Oh, she was a blueblood, all right. James Madison sat in that very chair and bounced her on his knee. I don't know how many Presidents and dukes have dined here over the years. But the city has changed, and she remained static. She considered the Astors and the Vanderbilts *nouveaux riches*. She was *downtown* society, while the real *crème* had moved up to Fifth Avenue. *That's* why I believe she took her own life. She was lonely and despondent, shut away down here, living in the past—"

"And how do you explain the death of the dogs?"

"It was in character, Captain Fenley. She loved those animals as much as she did her nephew. She wouldn't leave them behind."

"Tell me, Miss Lathrom," Phipps asked, "what were her views on Darwin?"

"Charles Darwin? You mean evolution? She was appalled by the concept that man descended from the apes. Of course, I am medically trained and can see the scientific importance of Darwin's work. But how is evolution pertinent to my aunt's death?"

"Forgive an idiosyncratic turn of mind, Miss Lathrom. I am always looking for an intellectual basis for seemingly irrational situations."

There were voices in the outer hall and the butler entered. "Young Mr. Prendergast is here, Miss Esther. And, Captain Fenley, a Sergeant Bryant would like a word with you on the porch."

"Tubby," Esther Lathrom said to a well dressed young man who passed Fenley in the doorway, "this is Doctor Phipps, who's with the police. Thomas Prendergast, a friend of the family."

The two men nodded to each other. Only in his early thirties, Prendergast already sported a corporation under his pearl-grey vest and the beginnings of jowls above his starched collar. He looked like a bright-eyed, good-natured cherub.

"Phipps?" he said with a grin. "Oh, yes—the one the newspapers call the Hawk."

"It's an epithet I disdain, sir."

"Well, as a matter of fact, I can see where the scribblers get it from," Prendergast said with a chuckle as he observed Phipps's sharp features. "However, I can't see our sorrowful affair as being up your alley, Doctor. Aunt Cissy's death was obviously suicide."

He turned to Esther Lathrom. "You know, this wouldn't have happened if Bridie were still here."

"Bridie?" Phipps asked.

"Bridie Cooney, Doctor. She was Aunt Cissy's personal maid until a month ago. She handled her medication," Esther explained.

"One of those fiery Irish wenches," Prendergast added. "She had a row with the old lady and walked out. Still, if she'd been here she'd have kept an eye on the old girl."

"Have you heard anything?" Esther asked Prendergast anxiously. Phipps perked up his ears.

"One thing's sure," Prendergast responded, "Shelby's not on the campus or anyplace in New Haven. Dick Soper, his roommate, wired me back that he hasn't seen him in days."

"But he promised he was going back there the other night—" Esther Lathrom caught herself short.

Prendergast sensed her caution and changed the subject. "I suppose there will be an inquest, Es, but that's a formality. They'll probably come up with 'death by misadventure' out of deference to the family name."

"Are you an attorney, Mr. Prendergast?" Phipps asked.

"No, sir. Not yet. I take the bar exams next month. I'm clerking at my uncle's firm in the meantime. But one doesn't have to be a full-fledged attorney to see that this was misadventure."

"Possibly," Phipps replied and, seeing Fenley beckon to him from the hall, he got to his feet and excused himself.

"Step out on the stoop for a moment," the policeman said with a hint of urgency.

But when they were outside, his demeanor changed from urgency to something akin to glee. "It was conine in the chocolates, all right. Bryant here just gave me the word. They aren't through with the autopsy yet, but it's murder clear enough. But that's not the sweet part." His face beamed with satisfaction. "Guess who called on Mrs. Chapman yesterday afternoon? Mrs. Letitia Straber. That's a beautiful tie-up, don't you think?"

"Yes, it is, but now we have another aspect to consider. Let me test

your memory. What was the name of the maid who answered Mrs. Straber's door the other night?"

"Something Irish—Bridget? No, Bridie."

Phipps related what he had learned and Fenley gave a low whistle of amazement, turned, and looked across the Square with narrowed eyes. "It looks like we've got a return engagement at Number Eighteen, Doctor."

Mrs. Lettie Straber answered the door herself and showed the two men into her rather overdone front parlor.

"Yes, my maid's name is Bridie Cooney, Captain," she said. "But your guess is as good as mine as to where she's got to. I haven't seen hide nor hair of her since the night the monkey died."

"Did you know she was formerly employed in the neighborhood?"

"Please don't be coy, Dr. Phipps. I knew she had worked for Mrs. Chapman. That's why I hired her. Gentlemen, I make no pretense about wanting to break into New York society. I'm a recent widow with too much money and I was bored to tears in St. Louis. I hired Bridie thinking she could give me some social tips, only to find her former employer is a bit out of fashion. That's why I threw the party the other night. I had a lot of swells down from Fifth Avenue to enjoy a joke, but the monkey dying made a hash of it. So I'm washed up, uptown *and* downtown. I've learned my lesson, believe me. I'm just going to be plain Lettie Straber from now on."

Her expression turned serious. "I felt so guilty about mocking the old lady that I went over to her house yesterday to try to make it up to her. She kept me waiting for ten minutes and then wouldn't see me."

Phipps orchestrated his next question with calculated forethought. "May we talk with Shelby Chapman for a moment?"

"Why, Doctor, what gave you the idea there is anyone here by that name?"

"The fact that his cap is hanging on the tree in the hall and there are two cups on that coffee tray. Come, Mrs. Straber—I think he would be interested to know that his aunt is dead."

Her expression of shock seemed genuine to Fenley, but he had little time to question it. At that moment the tousle-haired young man stepped into the parlor from where he had been listening in the hall. "I'd like to speak with these gentlemen alone, Lettie," he said . . .

Shelby Chapman looked drawn and tired as he sat down. "When? How?" he asked. He was in his shirtsleeves.

"Last night," Fenley said. He explained about the conine, the dogs, and the suspicion of murder.

"It had to be suicide," Chapman said after some moments of thought. "And I'm the cause." He sunk his head into his hands. "I've made such a mess of everything! The dean must have written her and she couldn't take the scandal. I might just as well have killed her with my bare hands."

"When was the last time you used the needle, Shelby?" Phipps asked.

Chapman stared at him.

"This morning, early."

"Morphine?"

"Yes, but—oh, of course, you're a doctor."

"Moreover, I'm observant. The pupils of your eyes and the small bloodstain now on your shirtsleeve are suggestive. How long has it been?"

"Almost a year. It started out as a lark with some medical students and turned into a nightmare. The college officials found out and I'm bounced—what a mess. I've tried to give it up, but I can't. Thank God for Lettie. She's been my Rock of Gibraltar."

"Mr. Chapman, the rock on which you founder is the rock to which you cling. Mrs. Straber is not helping you by buying morphine for you. Do you have a latchkey to your aunt's house?"

"Of course," Chapman said, looking at the two men. "Say, are you serious about this murder business? You don't think that I—?"

"We're eliminating suspects, Mr. Chapman," Fenley said. "Do you have any idea how your aunt's estate is consigned?"

"No, not really. Old Prendergast is her lawyer. He'd know. I guess it comes to me in the main, with something for my cousin Esther, surely. We're all she's got—or had."

Fenley's questions about his whereabouts the previous night produced the feeble alibi that he had spent the entire time with Lettie Straber.

To Fenley's thinking, Phipps then asked a superfluous question. Had either Esther Lathrom or Bridie Cooney known of his addiction? The answer was no in each case. Before departing, Fenley asked for and received permission to see the maid's room.

"Well, my money's on Bridie Cooney," Fenley said as they walked away from Number 18, Washington Square.

"Really? Why?"

"It's as plain as the nose on your face, man. A hot-headed Irishwoman poisons a monkey as a symbol of her former employer and then does the same to the lady herself."

"An implausible motive, my friend. Why poison the monkey in the first place? And how did Mrs. Chapman know about the Straber party?"

"Probably some of her social friends."

"It seems she didn't have any."

"Oh, I can see it coming, Doctor. You're off on one of your fanciful excursions again. *You* saw the Cooney woman's room back there. She left all her belongings and skedaddled."

"Yes, that is strange." Phipps was thoughtful.

Fenley looked at him and shook his head impatiently.

Three days later, he entered Phipps's rooms triumphantly and announced, "It was Bridie Cooney, all right. She's committed suicide in a Five Points boarding house."

"Coniine again?"

"No, she hanged herself. Either her guilt got the better of her or she knew the law would catch up with her sooner or later. These greenhorns don't like to be cornered, you know."

"Was there a note of confession?"

"No, but her action speaks for itself." He frowned. "Now, you don't look satisfied, and that always galls me."

"I'm sorry, my dear Fenley. But instead of feeling galled you should consider yourself gulled—for that is exactly what's been done to you *and* me. Remember what we found in the poor woman's room at the Straber house?"

"Clothes and a few books is all."

"No, there was something else there that interested me."

Fenley mentally reviewed the room. "The little religious statue?"

"Yes, with the votive candle before it—connoting a deep religious conviction. Some of your Bowery boys might turn a gun on themselves when surrounded by the police, Fenley, but a devout Irish girl does not commit suicide so readily. In the Roman Church, murder can be expiated—but suicide, the ultimate sin, cannot. Our murderer now has two victims on his list."

"Who does that leave us, then?" Fenley asked. "Mrs. Straber? She did

come to the old lady's house, but she never got above the first floor. Shelby Chapman? He might have gained entry to the house at night with his latchkey and replaced the box of chocolates."

"But why would he? You're forgetting the inheritance."

"No, I'm not. According to Attorney Prendergast Mrs. Chapman changed her will three days before she died. Everything now goes to Esther Lathrom—except for a thousand-dollar trust she left to Bridie Cooney."

"Ah, I was right."

"You mean you think Esther did it? But she wasn't at Mrs. Straber's party, and she knew nothing about the monkey's death."

"I was complimenting myself on thinking the way an aristocratic old lady would. We have some small details to clear up, Fenley, but they are not insurmountable."

"Small details?"

"Yes, indeed. The intriguing question is—does Esther Lathrom love Shelby Chapman?"

A workday and a half lay ahead of Captain Fenley, but Phipps's suggestion finally paid off and concluded itself in the Chapman music room. Esther Lathrom was a bit shocked when Shelby turned up, bringing Lettie Straber with him. Calvin Prendergast, the lawyer who had drawn the new will, sat like a stolid walrus while his nephew divided his moral support as best he could between his uncle and Esther.

"Ladies and gentlemen," Phipps said, "we would like to clear up some important details and put this case to rest."

"Hear, hear," grumped the senior Prendergast.

"When Mrs. Chapman changed her will, sir," Phipps addressed him, "would you say she was angry?"

"Not at all. She was very businesslike."

"Calm? Collected?"

"If you're asking if she was sane, the answer is yes."

"What were the specifications of the old will?"

"The bulk was to go to Shelby. Esther was to receive a five-thousand-dollar trust. The rest—charities, servants, and so forth—remained the same."

"Now, Miss Lathrom, did your 'aunt' tell you of the new will?"

"No, she did not."

"The other day when Thomas Prendergast was wiring New Haven to locate Shelby, I heard you to say he had promised to return to school. When did he promise?"

"Two days before my aunt's death."

"The night of Mrs. Straber's party?"

"I don't know anything about a party, sir. I met Shelby accidentally in the Square and was astonished to find him in New York. I reprimanded him and he promised to get back to New Haven, where he belonged."

"Do you usually reprimand grown men?"

"Shelby can be impetuous at times."

Phipps turned his attention to Mrs. Straber.

"Mrs. Straber, who suggested the monkey stunt to you?"

"I thought it up myself," she said. "I'm not proud of it now."

"Shelby didn't suggest it? Or Bridie Cooney?"

"No," she said emphatically.

"There was a gentleman of Latin extraction at your party. You called him Gustave, I believe."

"Yes, Count Gustave de Bressi." Phipps waited. Mrs. Straber's eyes wavered. "Well, he did encourage me with the monkey idea."

"I thought as much. A European mind would see the irony in such a symbol, especially a European who is no more a member of royalty than I am. I suggest that you consult Captain Fenley's people before you take up with continental 'gentlemen' again. Police inquiries tell us he is actually Carlo Monti, a professional fortune-hunter. Perhaps it would have been safer for you to have remained in St. Louis, Mrs. Straber."

"See here, Dr. Phipps," the senior Prendergast said with irritation, "where is all this getting us? I haven't the time to waste on social nonsense."

Phipps smiled. "Precisely, sir. Yet social science may yet help us. Auguste Comte's work in sociology may well be the key to this case."

"I can't see what some Hottentots' doings has to do with this."

"Hottentots and New York bluebloods share one thing, Attorney Prendergast—tribal folkways. Let's fit it into this case. First, we have the death of the monkey. That has been the snag from the outset. Since conine was used in its death and that of Mrs. Chapman, there is the notion the two must be connected. And, following this lock-step thinking, we have played into a clever killer's hands. However, if you take the view that they are unconnected events and add some sociology, all is clear."

"When Mrs. Chapman summoned Fenley and myself here on the night of Mrs. Straber's monkey stunt, I asked myself how she, a virtual recluse, knew of the impending mockery of her name. Someone had to have told her. And who would be a better candidate than her spy in the enemy's camp, Bridie Cooney?"

"Spy!" Lettie Straber exclaimed.

"Queens often have agents at foreign courts, madam. Also, Bridie reportedly had a row with Mrs. Chapman and walked out. Bad sociology. Personal maids don't walk out; they are banished. They are certainly not left legacies. Yes, Mrs. Straber, Bridie was a spy, and she dutifully reported the monkey business to her mistress.

"As a result, Mrs. Chapman, cunning as any Borgia, gave Bridie a deadly amount of conline with which to destroy the monkey and embarrass Mrs. Straber with a police investigation. You see, Mrs. Straber, Mrs. Chapman was subtle and you were not. However, she did not tell Bridie about the police part of her plan, and the girl fled the scene, feeling betrayed.

"Disconnecting the two deaths, Mrs. Chapman's murder is simply explained. I must caution you, Miss Lathrom, that you are immediately suspect, since your 'aunt' changed her will after learning that her nephew had become involved in a rather sordid affair in New Haven."

Calvin Prendergast sputtered through his arched moustache. "You're impugning my integrity, sir! I gave Miss Lathrom no inkling of the revision of the will. And to suggest such a thing is actionable."

"Your nephew is your law clerk, Mr. Prendergast. He could have told Miss Lathrom."

Tubby Prendergast puffed like a blowfish. "That's preposterous!"

"Be calm, gentlemen," Phipps said. "I was merely pointing out the possibilities. I now have a question for Miss Lathrom." He turned and looked at her with his hawklike gaze. "Are you in love with Shelby Chapman, young lady?"

She gasped and put her hand to her bosom as if stabbed. Tears filled her eyes and she rushed from the room—into the waiting arms of a police matron.

Lettie Straber let out an inappropriate laugh. "By golly, if you aren't the panther's nightshirt," she told Phipps.

"A highly improbable piece of imagery, madam."

"Could be, but you saw through it, and that's a heap of class. The law

clerk here tells her about the will change and she poisons the old girl to get the money and bring Shelby back to the family—with a ring through his nose."

"Not so fast, Mrs. Straber. I haven't accounted for Bridie Cooney's death."

"Well, you've said they were separate situations."

"Yet connected as far as the killer is concerned. And the killer is our main business, is it not? Poor Bridie—she carries out her mistress's orders and suddenly a burly police official appears. She reacts wantonly; but within her sociology. Authority is repressive in Ireland, and her wariness of it was not left behind. What would she do—what did she do—but seek legal advice?"

"This is the last straw!" Calvin Prendergast exploded. "I do not counsel servant girls, sir!"

"To your discredit, Mr. Prendergast. You might have given her sound advice that would have saved her life! But you were too forbidding, so she sought out a more familiar figure—a good-natured, jovial friend of the family."

"Well, it seems I'm not to be left out after all," Tubby Prendergast said with false heartiness. "Press on, Mr. Hawk. I'm flattered."

"I will, sir. You have always been an intriguing part of this social tapestry, and you captured my attention from the outset. For instance, you seem a bit old to be taking the bar exams for the first time. Captain Fenley's research shows you have failed them on three occasions."

"Hardly a crime, I'm afraid."

"No, Mr. Prendergast, the crime comes later, but it does fall within your *persona dramatis*. You are a man with few prospects in life beyond a clerkship in your uncle's law office. You, like Miss Lathrom, are that character more to be pitied than disdained, the poor relation."

"I may not be a legal genius, Dr. Phipps, but a mere idiot can tell you I had no motive in the death of Mrs. Chapman, not being about to gain a sou in her will."

"Even your meager legal knowledge should tell you that motive need not be proved—only means and opportunity—which you definitely had, once Bridie Cooney told you of her imagined plight. You and you alone were now aware of the dramatic elements on both sides of Washington Square. Esther knew nothing of the monkey's death, and Shelby Chapman and Lettie Straber knew nothing of the disinheritance."

"So you played upon Bridie's fears, suggesting she lay low until you could smooth things over. You knew the police were investigating the death of the monkey and that coniine had been used. So, using the same toxin, you poisoned the chocolates, did away with the old lady, and brought a fortune to Miss Lathrom, to whom you undoubtedly also proposed marriage."

"He did," said a voice from the doorway. A red-eyed Esther came back into the room. "He proposed to me the day before Aunt Cissy's death."

"There is your motive," Phipps said to young Prendergast. "And there is your gain. I doubt that you took the dogs into consideration, but they didn't matter. Mrs. Chapman's death could go either way—natural causes or murder—with Bridie as the prime suspect in the latter case. I could almost forgive you the old lady's death, but hanging the naive and unsuspecting Bridie was a brutal action."

"I think my Uncle Calvin will agree," Tubby Prendergast said imperiously, "that you have concocted a fairy tale lacking one shred of proof."

"Really?" Phipps said. "The landlady of 38 Baxter Street, Five Points district, remembers you well. You may not hang for Mrs. Chapman's death, but you will for the murder of Bridie Cooney."

Tubby Prendergast had been taken into custody and Phipps sat opposite Esther Lathrom in a solarium at the back of the house.

"I still haven't received an answer to my question, Miss Lathrom. Do you love Mr. Chapman?"

"What difference does it make? Your eyes can tell you I am not pretty. Shelby has a taste for pretty women, Dr. Phipps. I have always been merely Cousin Es to him, and now that he is penniless he'll have no use for me."

"I doubt it. And so did your Aunt Cissy. She didn't disinherit her nephew out of anger or spite. The senior Prendergast told us she was quite calm when she amended her will. She did it to save him, to make him dependent on you."

"Money is no way to hold a man, Doctor."

"No. But neither is romantic love, I'm afraid. He desperately needs your strength and caring now if he is to rid himself of his addiction. Don't discount his genuine affection for you. He showed great concern when I pretended to accuse you of murder. Let me send him to you, please. He wants to talk with you."

After some moments she nodded and Phipps got to his feet.
"You've inherited more than money, Esther," he told her. "Mrs. Chapman has given you her domain, and it was a wise choice."

Later, as he strolled across Washington Square, Phipps encountered Lettie Straber, who had obviously been waiting for him.

"Say," she said with a smile on her face, "I said it before and I'll say it again, Doctor, you're the panther's nightshirt. If you ever get out St. Louis way, look me up, will you?"

"I'd be delighted, ma'am. So you are deserting New York, are you?"

"It seems to have deserted me. This has been a real education, I can tell you. What's that sociology fellow's name—Compton?"

"Comte. Auguste Comte."

"I'm going to read up on him."

"Do, madam, do."

"Well, I'm off to herd with my own kind," she said, holding out her hand.

"Comte would call it your peer group, I believe."

"Peer group, herd—it doesn't matter what you call them. But at least they don't go around murdering people to assure their social position."

Phipps took her hand and shook it. "Give them time, madam," he said. "Evolution is a constant process."





CRIME ON SCREEN

by Peter Christian

Hitchcock's world was rarely one of menacing shadows and piercing screams. Hitchcock's world found its fears in bright sunshine, amid the elegant surroundings, say, of the Riviera gold coast, a European embassy, or the quiet streets of an English village or American small town. That world has now lost its master, but its inhabitants are with us still, on view whenever the art of screen suspense in its highest form is discussed and appreciated.

Hitchcock's world first took shape in England, the young director experimenting with melodramatic romances slowly increasing the element of suspense. An early image of that world was his 1926 thriller, *The Lodger*, in which he took the Belloc Lowndes novel and reworked it, using a theme he was to return to often: an innocent man pursued for another's crime. Other films followed, with titles like *Blackmail* and *Murder*, and the director moved into the sound era firmly grasping the new device as a tool for tension, augmenting his superb visual skill at telling a story and keeping an audience on the edge of its collective chair. By the mid-thirties Hitch was in his stride, having mastered the mystery form and becoming identified with it. His world was being defined. Terror lurked everywhere, but humor could be found there too, and civilized, very interesting people.

In 1934 *The Man Who Knew Too Much* presented us with a hero whose daughter is abducted from a ski slope—because he has been whispered a dying secret about an assassination, another of Hitch's innocents cata-

pulted into events not of their own making. In 1935 the director took John Buchan's spy thriller, *The 39 Steps*, and made Dick Hannay perhaps the decade's most vivid cinematic adventurer, leaping off bridges and crossing moors handcuffed to a cool blonde in what was to become the classic Hitchcockian romantic event. Among the many unforgettable moments: the climax at the music hall when Hannay shouts to the performer, Mr. Memory, "What are the 39 steps?" "*The 39 steps are an organization of spies—*" And a shot rings out.

There followed a tale of espionage on a quite different level, Somerset Maugham's witty but more realistic *Secret Agent*, with John Gielgud as the spy Ashenden and Robert Young as a dapper, handsome villain, and *Sabotage*, Joseph Conrad's dark tale about the wife (Sylvia Sidney) of a terrorist bomber. In a much lighter vein Hitchcock then turned Josephine Tey's *A Shilling for Candles* into *Young and Innocent*, in which a young girl clears her boy friend of a murder charge by tracking down (as does the camera in one memorable scene) a compulsively blinking drummer. The next year—1938—gave us *The Lady Vanishes* ("Where is Miss Froy?" pleads Margaret Lockwood on a train journey through pre-war Europe), and Hitch's name was now synonymous with suspense. His next stop could only be Hollywood.

Before he left England he finished *Jamaica Inn*, a Daphne du Maurier period gothic about coastal wreckers. Charles Laughton is difficult as the villain, and Hitch was always uncomfortable with costume epics (the only other he was to do was *Under Capricorn*). Then to America and glory with du Maurier's *Rebecca*, which won Best Picture Academy Award for 1940. His second film in this country was the rousing *Foreign Correspondent*, a brink-of-the-war patriotic paean of epic breadth (reporters chasing the story of the century across Europe just ahead of "the war that starts tomorrow, weather permitting," climaxed with a spectacular plane crash into the Atlantic and a high-seas rescue). The film ends with Joel McCrea's emotion-charged report: "The lights are going out all over Europe. Keep your lights burning, America!" Despite creaking windmills, Amsterdam plaza assassinations in the rain, murder atop St. Paul's, the entire film was shot in Hollywood. It is a neglected masterpiece.

So is *Suspicion*, Hitch's next thriller, which won for Joan Fontaine the Oscar she deserved as well as for *Rebecca*. (In between, the director trifled with a comedy, *Mr. and Mrs. Smith*, which he was never to do again; he remarked ruefully afterwards that were he to try *Cinderella*

audiences would expect a corpse in the coach.) In *Suspicion*, the ending of the Frances Iles source novel, *Before the Fact*, is laundered and indeed violated, but despite this change the film is moving and beautiful and sensitive. As is Fontaine.

With *Saboteur* (1942) Hitch made his first attempt at an American 39 Steps, with Robert Cummings swinging heroically from the West Coast to a confrontation atop the Statue of Liberty. *Shadow of a Doubt*, Hitchcock's favorite film, is smalltown America at its truest, with only a wife-murderer intruding. *Lifeboat* is another bravura demonstration of the director's technical mastery, for the *entire* movie takes place on a lifeboat bobbing on the Atlantic.

Salvador Dali provided the bizarre but telling dream sequences for Hitch's psychiatric murder mystery, *Spellbound*, yet another innovative canvas. And *Notorious* brought us another look at spies, interwoven with a romance which is somewhat notorious. Cary Grant and Ingrid Bergman, two of the director's favorites, are the participants. *The Paradine Case*, wordy and mostly confined to a courtroom, is another valiant experiment which deserved better; Gregory Peck is here as spellbound (this time by an alluring client with ambiguous guilt) as he was in the psychiatric film.

Stage Fright, shot in England, is a sprightly adaptation of the Eve Gill stories, a pleasing tale of backstage theater and garden fetes and an assertive (and then-some!), engaging heroine. Next, Hitchcock helmed one of his most impressive films, *Strangers on a Train* (1951), from the Patricia Highsmith novel about a debonair young maniac who carries out a bizarre scheme of exchanging murders. Robert Walker as the utterly charming but quite insane Bruno Anthony—carried away while demonstrating strangle-holds at a Washington party—is a portrait to remember. In a sense he is a cousin to the wicked young students of the earlier *Rope*, who throw *their* party after killing a classmate; the body is still concealed in the room. This 1948 film is confined by both space and time—startlingly innovative, Hitch tells the story in seemingly one single take and in a loft setting outside the windows of which dusk settles over the Manhattan skyline—and has unfortunately not been seen in years. In *I Confess* (1953) the constraining space is the confessional, in which a killer reveals his deed to priest Montgomery Clift who is later both accused of the murder and the killer's target.

Dial M for Murder, though originally shot in 3-D, was equally constricted, the celebrated stage play with all its good talk rather faithfully

adapted. In *Rear Window* it is James Stewart who is confined: his leg in a cast, helpless, he witnesses a killing outside his apartment window. For Stewart's view, Hitch constructed the façade of an actual-sized building with streets beyond on the Paramount lot. The film revived the director's somewhat flagging spirits—he had not been satisfied with his last few efforts—and ushered him into the best years of his career. *To Catch a Thief* was a glittering bit of Riviera nonsense in which Cary Grant and Grace Kelly set off sexual fireworks. *The Man Who Knew Too Much* was a lavish remake of the earlier film, and serves to demonstrate for us two small examples of Hitch's acumen. He persuaded Doris Day to sing the song in the film ("Que Sera, Sera"), a song of which she did not think much; it became her biggest hit and ultimate trademark. And he worried James Stewart by dropping his two paragraphs of explanation from the script because it got in the way of the climactic action at Albert Hall—but he was right: nobody missed them.

The Trouble with Harry was a "small" film set in autumnal Vermont, little more than a shaggy dog story. *The Wrong Man* was a stark, black-and-white docudrama about unjust accusation long ahead of its time. *Vertigo*—from a novel by the authors of *Diabolique*—was a dizzying, disturbing tale of a cop who loses the girl he loves to death yet finds her again. It is almost mystical, almost hallucinatory, and a masterpiece. But *North by Northwest* (1959), which followed, was more of a popular favorite—a slick, modern chase adventure seeded by those familiar 39 steps which ends with Cary Grant and Eva Marie Saint clinging from Lincoln's craggy face atop Mount Rushmore.

Hitchcock literally shocked the world with his next film, the landmark *Psycho* (1960) and again tried new territory three years later with his filming of du Maurier's bizarre, apocalyptic *The Birds*, more fantasy than mystery. Then, in *Marnie* (1964), we were presented with a true puzzle: a psychological probing of why the coolly beautiful blonde heroine (Hitch's favorite kind, this time impersonated by Tippi Hedren) is neurotic, terrified of men, and a compulsive thief. The film was not popular, but it had many layers of charm. *Torn Curtain* was espionage behind the Iron Curtain, and *Topaz* was an international spy ring exposed. Neither showed Hitchcock in top form, but his next film would.

Frenzy (1972) drove both critics and audiences wild: a return to the great tradition. A former RAF pilot, a drifter, is accused of a series of London sex-murders because both his former wife and girl friend are

victims. Our hero is nearly to the gallows before he manages to escape prison and clear himself. The film had all the tensions and delights of vintage Hitch. *Family Plot*, which followed in 1976, was considerably lighter in theme, but contained much of the director's outrageous humor—kidnapping the bishop from the cathedral, for instance—and a delightfully arch last line.

Hitchcock was working on *Short Night* when he died, a blending of two spy novels dealing with a Philbylike betrayal. (It has been said that the title was his pun reflecting on his lack of physical stature and recent knighthood.) The script is finished—and, as Hitch often said, all the work is in the script; the filming afterwards is almost perfunctory. Ten years of *Alfred Hitchcock Presents* in television reruns also keep him with us, as well as his sly, quick appearances in all his films. Despite his death, the world he conjured still remains for us, and for the ages. What a treasure that gift is.

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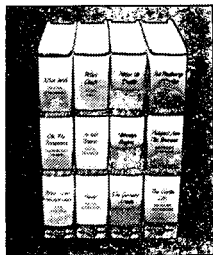
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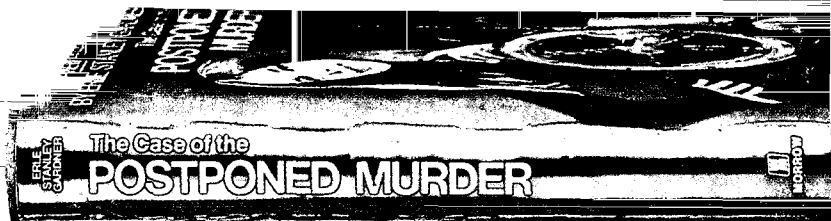
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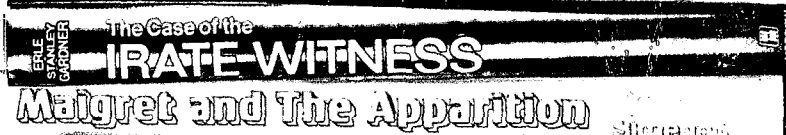
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